NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
Monterey, California

THESIS

AN ANALYSIS OF FEDERAL BUDGET INFORMATION ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB
by
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December 1998
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19990201 041

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE December 1998	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE An Analysis of Federal Budget Information on the World Wide Web			5. FUNDING NUMBERS
6. AUTHOR(S) Goodwin, Brian Michael			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES
The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.	12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

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14. SUBJECT TERMS Appropriation, Authorization, Federal Budget, Internet, World Wide Web, Websites, Webpages.			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 134
			16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFI- CATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UL

NSN 7540-01-280-5500

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2-89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239-18

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AN ANALYSIS OF FEDERAL BUDGET INFORMATION
ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

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MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MANAGEMENT

from the

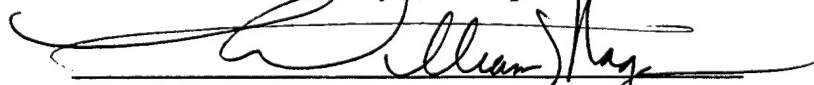**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**
December 1998

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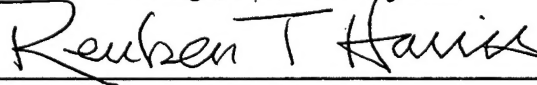Brian Michael Goodwin

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of the Internet has progressed significantly, encouraging organizations to improve the quality of information in websites. This phenomenon has impacted sources of information available on the federal budget. This thesis examines this development by documenting the scope of federal budget information on the Internet. Literature on the federal budget process and the World Wide Web was reviewed. More than 120 executive, legislative and private interest group websites were sampled. Websites were characterized using the criteria of timeliness of data, accessibility to data and ideological orientation. The thesis concludes that significant federal budget information is available on the Internet. In terms of web-publishing federal budget data, Congress and proprietary sites were the most timely. Accessibility varied with the significance to the website sponsor of federal budget policies. An ideological range within the websites sampled was depicted, from the ostensibly neutral to the obviously partisan. The thesis provides a discussion and examples of websites sponsored by many federal and private organizations. Web users interested in the federal budget can benefit from this information to guide their use of the Internet.

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I.   INTRODUCTION

A.   PURPOSE

The purpose of the research in this thesis is to identify and examine United States Federal Government budgetary data available on the World Wide Web. The thesis scopes the field of federal budget information that is published on the Internet in web pages by multiple sources. Emphasis has been placed on providing a framework for interpreting the information and understanding the perspectives of web sources. Also, the thesis will help the reader navigate and identify the most useful websites. The thesis analyzes the content of select websites to show what sources are timely, partisan and accessible based on a set of criteria that were developed in the course of research.

B.   BACKGROUND

The evolution of the World Wide Web as a resource for the dissemination of information has progressed to the extent that public and private organizations of all kinds are devoting effort to using the World Wide Web as a means of communication. This phenomenon has impacted the amount, type and quality of information available on the subject of the federal budget. Federal agencies and private

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organizations use the web to communicate information concerning the federal budget. Thus, citizens, budget scholars, the research community, government offices and advocacy groups are increasingly becoming producers and consumers of web-based budgetary information.

Government and private organizations have expanded the use of electronic forms of communication and dissemination of data via the Internet. There are concomitant conditions and information technology architectures that have become important to users of federal budget information. There is a need to examine this development in terms of the scope of information promulgated, as well as conditions of timeliness, accuracy, and the manner in which users access data.

There are variations in web-published data in terms of format and content among the federal agencies. Most federal agencies now use the Internet as a means of communication with external as well as internal customers. Users of this data are challenged by variation in the range and quality of data available on the Internet. Attempts to find specific sources of information meet with a landscape that includes a potentially daunting array of web search engines and numerous websites which may or may not be relevant to user needs.

Further, differences exist in the quality of web-based federal budget data. User based criteria can be developed whereby websites can be evaluated in terms of a set of criteria to include timeliness, accessibility and accuracy of data. The range of data theoretically extends from the cumbersome and ponderous to the eloquent and efficient. Consumers must also be sensitive to the ideological orientation of the web publisher and thus careful to note possible distortion or omission of key elements of data. Thus, consumers of federal budget data need a web-centered guide that evaluates the data in terms of user based criteria.

C.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.   Primary Question:

- What is the scope and nature of federal budgetary information available on the World Wide Web?

2.   Subsidiary Questions:

- What resources concerning the federal budget are available on the Internet?

- How can web-based budget information be categorized?

- How current is the published material?

- How well is currency maintained?

- What are the ideological perspectives of the publishing entities and how does that affect the manner in which budget data is promulgated?

- How accessible is the data?

- Is data readable or downloadable? What are the challenges presented to users in order to access the data?

D.   SCOPE, LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

This thesis utilized web specific search engines to seek federal budgetary data found on the World Wide Web as part of the assessment. The search was confined to data relevant to the federal budget; data on state and local budgets are not included.   The timeframe for this study is limited to fiscal year 1998 and 1999.   This includes budget activity during the Clinton Administration and the second session   of   the   105th   Congress.   Conclusions   and generalizations in this thesis are based on content analysis of   the   information   discovered   on   websites   during   the aforementioned time period.

E.   METHODOLOGY

This thesis uses the World Wide Web to examine the electronic archival domain of federal budget data. Content analysis has been conducted on a selected number of websites.   Content has been assessed and evaluated using user-based criteria defined in this thesis in Chapter III. A key objective of the thesis is to establish a framework for the type and quality of data available that can guide

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federal budget data consumers. In addition, journals appropriate to public policy, budgeting and information technology have been reviewed to determine if complementary research has been completed in this area. No other research efforts with similar objectives were identified in the materials reviewed.

F. ORGANIZATION

In Chapter II, the reader will find an overview of the scope of federal budget information available on the World Wide Web. Trends in the evolution of the use of the Internet are addressed.

Chapter III provides the basis for establishment of a framework for key qualitative characteristics of web-based federal budget data. The characteristics allow for the assessment and content analysis of selected websites. This assessment is conducted in Chapters IV, V and VI.

Chapter IV is an assessment of the timeliness of web-based federal budget data. Chapter V examines the ideological framework of web-based federal budget data and chapter VI focuses on ease of accessibility of websites by Internet users.

Chapter VII provides conclusions and recommendations for use of information contained within this research paper.

G.   BENEFITS OF STUDY

This thesis provides government officials, scholars, policy advocates and other users of federal budget data with a valuable tool for interaction with the federal budget in an electronic environment. Evaluation of federal budget websites provides a means to choose sources and quickly assess data from specific websites. Scholars and administrators attempting to find federal budget data resources in a timely and orderly fashion can use this thesis as a starting point in locating useful information.

II. OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL BUDGET INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the scope of federal budget information available on the Internet. This chapter defines key terms used to discuss the Internet and addresses the proliferation of World Wide Web usage by the federal government. The chapter estimates the growth in web accessibility by US citizens and then identifies the type and format of federal budget information found on websites. It concludes with an argument for the need to develop a means of assessing websites using qualitative characteristics.

B. KEY TERMS DEFINED

INTERNET: Use of the term Internet in this thesis refers to the universe or Global Information Infrastructure (GII) wherein electronic information is published and exchanged. The contemporary concept of the Internet is best described as a system of systems which includes wired and wireless networks, information appliances such as computers, video-teleconferencing technology, and all of the information, applications and services accessible over these

networks.[1] The definition can extend to include the skills required to build, design and use these information and communications technologies. Thus, the Internet is a global matrix of interconnected computer networks, and the people and organizations that use this infrastructure.

The computer networks and single computer stations around the globe are of different designs and may use different operating systems. In order to link all of the various systems together, a set of instructions common to all machines or an Internet Protocol (IP) is utilized to allow the different systems to interact.[2]

The term "Internet" is used throughout this thesis to encompass all such data networks and hundreds of applications such as the World Wide Web and electronic mail (e-mail) that run on networks using the Internet protocol. E-mail refers to the messages that can be sent over the Internet to unique users at specified e-mail addresses.

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[1] Good sources of web and Internet information can be accessed at the World Wide Web Consortium [http://www.w3.org/WWW/], or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Laboratory for Computer Science at [http://www.lcs.mit.edu/about.html].

[2] (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) This is the suite of protocols that defines the Internet. Originally designed for the UNIX operating system, TCP/IP software is now available for every major kind of computer operating system and allows each computer to communicate across the Internet with other computers, regardless of format language or operating system. To interact with the Internet, a computer must have TCP/IP software.

World Wide Web: The World Wide Web is a computer application, which facilitates communication, data exchange and interaction over the Internet without regard to distance and time. The development of the World Wide Web application began in March 1989 at CERN, the European Laboratory for Particle Physics, as a method of transferring information more quickly to the international research community.[3] The web application was the first graphical and multimedia service on the Internet allowing information to be placed at a website using a distinct addressing concept.

The United States General Accounting Office (GAO) defines a website as a file or group of files organized under a homepage, accessible on the Internet using web browser software.[4] A website homepage is typically the index, welcome or menu page for a distinct activity or service. The World Wide Web consists of computers (servers) all over the world that store information in a textual as well as a multimedia format. Web browser software can read the various multimedia formats and allows the web user to view and manipulate web-based information.

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[3] CERN, "History of the Internet."
[http://wwwinfo.cern.ch/pdp/ns/ben/TCPHIST.html]. Nov 1998.

[4] General Accounting Office, "Report on Internet and Government Dial-up Bulletin Boards." [http://www.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/ getdoc.cgi? dbname=gao&docid=f:gg97086.txt]. Nov 1998.

Each of the websites has a specific Internet Protocol address comprised of a set of four numbers (each between 0 and 255, with some restrictions), separated by periods that uniquely identifies an address on a network. Internet Protocol (IP) addresses allow users to easily locate specific web pages, and every web page has a unique uniform resource locator (URL) that identifies it as a website.

The URL (e.g., http://www.senate.gov) is the textual equivalent of the IP address and tells an Internet user computer where to find the particular page. Each user computer that is on the Internet also has a distinct IP address. World Wide Web software facilitates information exchange between users and websites using this addressing concept. Best described as a constellation of resources, as of 1996 there were over 9.5 million IP addresses worldwide.[5]

World Wide Web pages are written in Hypertext Markup Language or HTML. This format allows text and multimedia to appear in various colors and sizes when loaded by a web browser such as Netscape or Internet Explorer. Most web browsers also display graphics files which can be embedded in the HTML code of a web page, allowing pictures to appear

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[5] Gray, Matthew, "Growth and Usage of the web and the Internet." [http://www.mit.edu:8001/people/mkgray/net/index.html]. Nov 1998.

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in various parts of a document, as well as using them as a background.

The World Wide Web can be queried for topics of interest using search engines. Search engines are software devices that search known URLs or web page content for key text items designated by the searcher. This ability to search thousands of websites for information of interest (e.g., the federal budget) makes the Internet and World Wide Web a powerful resource for communication, interaction and integration of citizens into the public policy process.

C. THE PROLIFERATION OF FEDERAL WORLD WIDE WEB USAGE

The proliferation of federal World Wide Web usage is directly related to two issues. The first issue is the extent to which citizens can acquire relevant web published government information; the second is the extent to which government agencies publish information on the Internet.

An assessment of citizens' access can be facilitated by reference to a 1997 General Accounting Office (GAO) study on the federal government's use of the Internet and dial-up bulletin boards.[6] The GAO study used data compiled by the Census Bureau in October 1997 through 48,000 door-to-door

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[6] General Accounting Office, "Report on Internet and Government Dial-up Bulletin Boards." [http://www.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=gao&docid=f:gg97086.txt]. Nov 1998.

surveys. As in a similar study in 1994, the 1997 data show that Americans have increasingly embraced electronic access in their homes. The 1997 data show the following nation-wide trends:

93.8% of households have telephones

36.6% of households have personal computers (PC)

26.3% of households have modem capability

18.6% of households have on-line service access

Compared to the 1994 survey results, the nationwide telephone rate has remained unchanged. The computer ownership rate has grown substantially in the last three years. PC ownership has increased 51.9 percent, modem ownership has grown 139.1 percent, and e-mail access has expanded by 397.1 percent.[7]

There is ample evidence that complementary growth is occurring in government use of the Internet to inform and interact with citizens. The 1997 GAO study states that 42 federal organizations reported having a total of 4,300 World Wide Websites and over 200 electronic dial-up Bulletin Board Systems. The 42 federal organizations estimated that they provided Internet e-mail access to about 1.7 million, or 50 per cent, of their civilian and military employees and World

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[7] Ibid.

Wide Web access to about 1 million, or about 30 per cent, of the employees.[8]

This thesis argues that citizens are increasing use of the Internet as a method of interacting in the public policy process. As part of the study the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) was examined by GAO in order to quantify evidence of increased use of the Internet by consumers of federal information assets. NOAA reported that, from 1991 to 1995, requests for digital data increased a hundredfold and online inquiries grew to over 200,000 per month.[9]

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) monitors its website activity and provides accessibility statistics summarized by month, day or up to the hour for all HHS website links.[10] The HHS site indicates growth in citizen access over time and is among several sites that have added similar tracking utilities to organization webpages.

Thomas, the Library of Congress website reports usage statistics for its webserver, providing annual, monthly,

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Department of Health and Human Services Web Server Statistics for [hhs.gov]. [http://www.hhs.gov/analog/199811.html#Rep3]. Nov 1998.

hourly and daily transmission statistics, and usage by high-level domain name and file retrieved. Data for the current and three previous years are available and indicate growth in use of the Thomas site over that time period.[11] Thus, it seems conclusive that government and citizens are increasingly utilizing electronic means of interface.

D. SCOPE OF FEDERAL BUDGET INFORMATION FOUND ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

The federal budget is much more than the final numbers relating spending and taxing. Rather, the federal budget is best described as a recurring process, which connects multiple congressional and executive branch policy decisions to a flow of documents, analysis and agency dispositions. Information on all elements of the budget process can be accessed and downloaded from the Internet.

Information on the federal government budget found on the web includes multiple documents and formats. Sources of the information include executive, legislative and non-governmental organizations.

The complexity of the budget process is reflected in the scope of the information found on the web. The diagram

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[11] Thomas, "Usage Statistics for the THOMAS World Wide Web Server [http://thomas.loc.gov/stats/stats.html]. Dec 1998.

below attempts to outline the flow of the federal budget process for a typical fiscal year.

THE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET PROCESS

EXECUTIVE BRANCH   CONGRESS   EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Discretionary Spending

PRESIDENT'S
BUDGET
REQUEST → Budget Resolution → Authorization Bills → Appropriation Bills → PRESIDENTIAL
(Budget Committees)   (Armed Services and   (Defense, National   SIGNATURE/VETO
National Security   Security, MILCON,
Committees)   Energy and Water, etc.)

Adjustments → No → No Reconciliation
to Revenues
or Entitlements?

Yes → Budget → Committees → Reconciliation →
Reconciliation   Report Bills IAW   Bill   PRESIDENTIAL
Reconciliation Instructions   SIGNATURE/VETO

(Finance, Ways and Means,
Agriculture, etc.)

Entitlement Spending/Taxes

JANUARY   APRIL   MAY/AUGUST   JULY/OCTOBER

Figure 2.1

Some key budgetary events are scheduled by law (e.g., The President's Budget Submission directed on the first Monday in February), and are the impetus for certain events within Congress and federal agencies. Other budget phenomena occur as funds are expended, or are the result of analysis of trends and subsequently become the basis for policy actions. Students of the budget can access Internet published replications of many actual budget documents. Also available for download is a myriad of analyses, opinion, political debate and specific agency budget

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information. A discussion of some of the many types of federal budget information available on the Internet follows.

1.   **Budget Documents**

a. **President's Budget Submission**

In accordance with The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921, the President is required to submit to Congress, on the first Monday in February, the Administration's budget request for the upcoming fiscal year (which begins October 1st).   The submission each year by the chief executive provides a centralized starting point to the federal government's financial policy and processes.

The President's Budget can be found at several websites including the Office of Management and Budget.[12] The budget submitted by the President contains administration targets for each agency, projects a deficit or surplus and estimates tax revenues.   Proposed policy changes, such as a tax increase or a change in entitlement benefits, can also be found in the President's Budget.

Tax increases or entitlement changes are highly volatile political and fiscal issues.   The Internal Revenue

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[12] Office of Management and Budget, "Homepage."
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OMB/html/ombhome.html]. Nov 1998.

Service, Treasury and other federal agencies, congressional committees such as the House Ways and Means Committee, private interest groups and concerned citizens monitor these issues closely.

Until funds are actually appropriated, or changes to tax and entitlement statutes become law, the President's Budget serves as the primary planning document for agencies, Congress and observers of the budget process.

b. Congressional Budget Office Estimate of the President's Budget

Following submission of the President's budget to Congress, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) performs an analysis of the submission. A comparison of the budget deficit or surplus, projected revenues and expenditures is provided. CBO also generates assessments of the economic impact of the President's budget with analyses of alternative fiscal policies.

CBO provides other products as a result of statutory requirements, or based on requests from members of Congress. These products include forecasts of the economy and analyses of economic trends. CBO keeps score during the congressional budget process by monitoring the results of congressional action. This includes reports on

authorization, appropriation, and revenue bills against targets or ceilings specified in the concurrent budget resolution, or other legislation as directed by the Congress. CBO can be accessed at [http://www.cbo.gov].

c. Concurrent Budget Resolution

Title III of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 requires Congress to complete action on a concurrent budget action by April 15th for the fiscal year that begins on the following October 1st. During the budget process, the budget resolution and reconciliation instructions that may accompany a resolution are of significant interest to observers of the budget process. The concurrent resolution on the budget is guidance passed by both Houses of Congress, which establishes the congressional budget outlook for the government for a fiscal year. Concurrent budget resolutions are not laws. Rather, they are a legislative device for the Congress to regulate itself as it works on spending and revenue bills.

When the recommendations in a concurrent resolution include changes to taxation or entitlement authorizations, the process of reconciliation follows. Instructions are provided to committees suggesting new allocations of spending, or entitlement changes. Each

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committee must address the reconciliation requirements and draft new legislation to change spending and/or revenue laws. Reconciliation and the bills it produces typically involve large amounts of spending and revenue over multiple years and are thus far reaching and controversial policy actions. Reconciliation bills were used through the 1980s and 1990s to reduce the deficit and to prompt changes in entitlement legislation.[13] Examples of concurrent budget resolutions and reconciliation bills can be found on the Internet at the Thomas congressional website.[14] Web users seeking the FY 1999 concurrent resolution will discover that for the first time since the 1974 enabling legislation, a concurrent resolution was not passed.

There are other web-published items of interest associated with the concurrent resolution, reconciliation and general budget legislation. An example is websites which provide records of conference reports and mark-ups.

Conference reports occur after the House and Senate reach agreement on a legislative action. The members make recommendations in a report required to be printed in both Houses and accompanied by an explanatory statement

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[13] Doyle R. B. "Reconciliation," *International Encyclopedia of Public Policy and Administration*, Vol 4, pp. 1910-1914, 1998.

sufficiently detailed to indicate the effect of the legislation. Since conference reports contain estimates of the impact of legislation, they are of significant interest to budget watchers.

Mark-up is the process whereby congressional committees work on the language of bills or resolutions. For example, Budget Committee mark-ups are House and Senate Budget Committee responses to the language and numbers contained in the President's Budget submission and produce congressional budget resolutions. Web users can get a sense of the direction of budget legislation early in the process by examining these web-published mark-ups. The Chairman's Mark, discussed below, is an example of a mark-up that initiates consideration of budget legislation.

d. Chairman's Mark

In preparation for the budget resolution process, each Budget Committee (Senate and House) Chairman may establish a mark, that is, a proposed budget resolution. It may or may not follow the President's budget. Inasmuch as there are different policy preferences between congressional and executive entities, between the House and the Senate,

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[14] Thomas, "Major Legislation by Short Title."
[http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d105/hot-titl.html]. Nov 1998.

and between the political parties controlling the House and the Senate, there are policy implications in the recommended budget totals found in the Chairman's Mark.

The Chairman's mark is used by committee members, who then must decide where or whether they agree with it. The Chairman's marks can be found within websites established for each congressional Budget Committee.[15]

e. Budget Function

Budget information is organized by function in the congressional budget resolution and in certain other budget documents.[16] Budget functions are a means of organizing the federal budget by major purpose so that budget authority and outlays can be related in terms of the national need being addressed regardless of the agency administering the program.

Reporting budget information by function assists observers in understanding macro budget priorities not

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[15] United States Senate Budget Committee, "1999 Chairman's Mark." [http://www.senate.gov/~budget/republican/major%20documents/ mark98/markcntnts.htm]. Nov 1998.; United States House of Representatives Budget Committee, "1999 Chairman's Mark." [http://www.house.gov/budget/mark2.htm]. Nov 1998.

[16] Senate Budget Committee, "Primer on the Federal Budget." [http://www.senate.gov/~budget/republican/reference/cliff_notes/ cliffapi.htm#Functional Classification]. Nov 1998.

totally discernable from a single appropriation. For example, the National Defense budget function (function 50) includes funding for the Department of Defense (DOD), atomic energy defense activities of the Department of Energy (DOE), and other defense activities in the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Selective Service, the General Services Administration, and other agencies.

Reports of budget information by function can be accessed online and include the following 20 functions:[17]

050: National Defense

150: International Affairs

250: General Science, Space, and Technology

270: Energy

300: Natural Resources and Environment

350: Agriculture

370: Commerce and Housing Credit

400: Transportation

450: Community and Regional Development

500: Education

550: Health

570: Medicare

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[17] The Senate Budget Committee, "1999 Chairman's Mark," contains budget estimates by function. A good means of accessing funding by function is to search budget related sites using the term "budget function." A search of the House Appropriations Committee identified over 50 sites using this phrase.

600: Income Security

650: Social Security

700: Veterans Benefits and Services

750: Administration of Justice

800: General Government

900: Net Interest

920: Allowances

950: Undistributed Offsetting Receipts.[18]

f. Authorization Acts

Authorization acts are legislation enacted by Congress that establishes or continues a federal program or agency. Authorizing legislation may limit the amount of budget authority that can be appropriated for a program or may authorize the appropriation of a necessary level of funding to ensure government action. Authorization acts also set levels of procurement or of systems. For example, the FY 1999 Defense Department Authorization bill sets

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[18] United States Senate Budget Committee, "Primer on the Federal Budget." [http://www.senate.gov/~budget/republican/reference/cliff_notes/cliffapa.htm]. Nov 1998.

levels for military hardware.[19] Web users can access links
to major authorization legislation at the Thomas web site.[20]

g. Appropriation Acts

Appropriation legislation provides actual funding
for government activities.   Each year ·Congress passes,
separately   or   as   part   of   omnibus   bills,   thirteen
appropriations   acts.   It is· important to note that
appropriated   levels   may   and   do   differ   from   amounts
authorized. In addition, appropriations consolidate funding
for multiple authorized government activities and agencies
across   the   federal   government.   One   appropriation
subcommittee may have funding jurisdiction for veteran's
programs, space exploration, housing and urban development
and more than a dozen other programs.[21]

For   example, the   1999   Treasury   and   Postal
appropriation bill combines multiple authorized functions

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[19] Senate Committee on Armed Services, "Defense Department FY 99
Authorization Bill." [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-
bin/bdquery/z?d105:SN02057:@@@L]. Nov 1998.

[20] Thomas, "Major Legislation by Short Title."
[http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d105/hot-titl.html]. Nov 1998.

[21] Schick, A., *The Federal Budget, Politics, Policy, Processes*, p. 137,
The Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 1995.

and or levels, and subsequently provides funds for the following functions:

> The Department of the Treasury for: (1) departmental offices; (2) automation enhancement; (3) the Office of Inspector General; (4) repair and restoration of the Treasury building and annex; (5) the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network; (6) violent crime reduction programs; (7) the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, including amounts for acquisition of additional real property and facilities and maintenance and facility improvements; (8) interagency law enforcement with respect to organized crime drug trafficking; (9) the Financial Management Service; (10) the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; (11) the U.S. Customs Service, including amounts for operations and maintenance of marine vessels and aircraft and collection of the Harbor Maintenance Fee; (12) the Bureau of the Public Debt; (13) the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), including amounts for tax law enforcement, earned income tax credit compliance and error reduction initiatives, information systems, and information technology investments; and (14) the Secret Service, including an amount for construction and improvement of facilities.[22]

Appropriations are public laws developed in the Appropriation Committees and debated in the full House and Senate. As stated in the US Constitution, "No money shall be drawn from the treasury, but in consequence of appropriations made by law; and a regular statement and

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[22] Unites States Congress, "1999 Treasury and Postal Appropriation Act." [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d105:HR04104:@@@D]. Nov 1998.

account of receipts and expenditures of all public money shall be published from time to time."[23]

However, federal spending for programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security is not appropriated but only authorized. Payments from the US Treasury are made in accordance with the levels set by Congress in authorization legislation. Such spending is referred to as mandatory.[24]

Additional types of appropriations are continuing resolutions and supplemental appropriations. A continuing resolution is an appropriation to maintain funding authority for government operations until regular appropriations are completed.

Supplemental appropriations provide additional funding authority for a current fiscal year when a regular appropriation is insufficient to meet the needs of the government, or when an activity of the government requires funds not provided previously.[25]

When signed by the President, appropriations become law and provide the obligation authority for federal

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[23] U.S. Constitution, Article 1, Section 9.

[24] Doyle R. B. "Entitlements," *International Encyclopedia of Public Policy and Administration*, Vol 4, pp. 1910-1914, 1998.

[25] Schick, A. *The Federal Budget, Politics, Policy, Processes*, p. 130, The Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 1995.

agencies to incur liabilities and to make payments out of
the Treasury for specified purposes. There are 13 regular
appropriations acts listed below by popular title:

Agriculture

Commerce

District of Columbia

Energy and Water

Foreign Operations

Interior

Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education

Legislative

Military Construction

National Security and Defense

Transportation, Postal

Veteran's Administration, Housing and Urban Development

And Independent Agencies.[26]

2. Other Congressional Committee, and Executive Actions

The Internet contains detailed information concerning
the entire course of a spending (authorization or

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[26] House Appropriations Committee, "Homepage."
[http://www.house.gov/appropriations/Nov 1998]. Nov 1998; Also, Library
of Congress, Thomas, "Current Status of FY 1999 Appropriations Bills."
[http://lcweb.loc.gov/global/legislative/appover.html]. Nov 1998.

appropriation) or revenue bill.[27] An example of this information for the FY 1999 Military Construction Bill is available at the THOMAS website.[28] Internet users can trace this bill through each subcommittee, committee, full House or Senate, and read the final text of the public law.

Congressional committee information is exemplified extensively in subsequent chapters, but it is worth noting here that every committee in both the Senate and House has a website providing information in the areas of committee interest. House committee and subcommittee websites can be found at [http://www.house.gov/house/CommitteeWWW.html]. A similar link for Senate committee and subcommittee websites is at [http://www.senate.gov/committee/committee.html]. An example of the type of budget information available includes access to current tax legislation found by visiting the House Ways and Means Committee website. The Ways and Means Committee is the starting point for legislation requiring changes to federal revenues. The Committee also has

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27 House Appropriations Committee, "Fact Sheets and General Information."
[http://www.house.gov/htbin/fe_srchget/comms/ap00/fact.htm]. Dec 1998.

28 United States Congress, "1999 Military Construction Bill."
[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d105:HR04059:@@@S]. Nov 1998.

oversight for Social Security, and some welfare related issues.[29]

Another aspect of budget policy is rescission of budget authority. This refers to the cancellation of budget authority previously approved by Congress and the President. Rescission begins when the President recommends a rescission for fiscal or policy reasons. Congress must approve the request before budget authority can be removed from an appropriation. Examples are available on the web that include congressional debate on rescission bills.[30] Rescission is just one example of changes that can occur to budgeted totals, reflecting the complex and dynamic nature of the budget process.

Still another example of budget information available on the web is the CBO's Discretionary Sequestration Report.[31] The Budget Enforcement Act (BEA) of 1990 set limits or caps on discretionary spending as a means of

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29 House Ways and Means Committee, "Homepage."
[http://www.house.gov/ways_means/]. Dec 1998.

30 House Appropriations Committee, "1998 Supplemental Appropriations and Rescissions Act." [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d105:
HR03580:@@@L]. Nov 1998.

31 Congressional Budget Office, "Discretionary Sequestration Report."[http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=1022&sequence=0&from=7].
Dec 1998.

deficit control.[32]   Spending that exceeds these caps provides for sequestration when CBO determines that annual appropriations are expected to exceed those limits. Sequestration is a means of reducing budget authority by a uniform percentage across multiple programs. Social Security, interest on the public debt, federal employee retirement, Medicaid and most entitlement programs are exempted from this process.

This CBO report provides the current status of budget authority provided in appropriations acts for the year to determine if spending will exceed the cap on budget authority for an appropriation. CBO publishes recommendations for comparison with OMB estimates. OMB ultimately controls the actual process of sequestration, should it be required.[33]

3.   Agency Budget Information

Earlier in this Chapter, a GAO report was referenced that identified the existence of 4,300 websites available from 42 federal government agencies. Research in the GAO report, and the growth in quantity and quality of federal

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[32] Doyle, R. B., and McCafferey, J.L., "The Budget Enforement Act of 1990: The Path to No Fault Budgeting," *Public Budgeting and Finance*, Vol 11, No. 1, p. 27, Spring 1991.

[33] United States Senate Budget Committee, "Primer on the Federal Budget." [http://www.senate.gov/~budget/republican/reference/cliff_notes/cliffapa.htm]. Nov 1998.

websites, indicate that federal government personnel utilize the Internet increasingly and extensively. Each federal agency site accessed in the course of research for this thesis provided budget information or a link to a site containing some relevant budget topics. Of the 120 plus websites reviewed in this thesis, over 60 were federal government websites, including sites at all 14 cabinet level agencies and other select federal agencies.

Each agency has unique budget practices and publishes budget information in varying formats. Several government agency websites provide URLs to the US Government Printing Office (GPO) website.[34] The GPO website serves as an electronic repository for numerous government documents, including many providing budget information. Agencies routinely link the GPO site where documents are maintained in order to promulgate information affecting the agency budget.

4. Private Interest Group and Other Information

The federal budget, including taxes and expenditures, represents significant transfers of wealth, and indicates administration and congressional policy preferences. Political parties, budget scholars, foreign governments and

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[34] United States Government Printing Office, "Homepage." [http://www.access.gpo.gov/]. Nov 1998.

citizen groups monitor the budget process within the context of each organization's political interest. Private organization websites are numerous and range in content from raw data to analysis with criticism. Using World Wide Web search engines, students of the budget process can access websites providing data on the federal budget developed and maintained by private and non-governmental organizations. The federal debt clock (Figure 2.2) below is a sample of one of the many types of private sector budget information found on the Internet.

<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 10px;">

U.S. NATIONAL DEBT CLOCK
The Outstanding Public Debt as of 10/28/98 at 07:42:00 PM PST is:

5,556,021,740,643.84

The estimated population of the United States is **270,937,064** so each citizen's share of this debt is **$20,506.69**.
Despite the current budget surplus, the debt has increased an average of
$345 million per day since October 1, 1997![35]

</div>
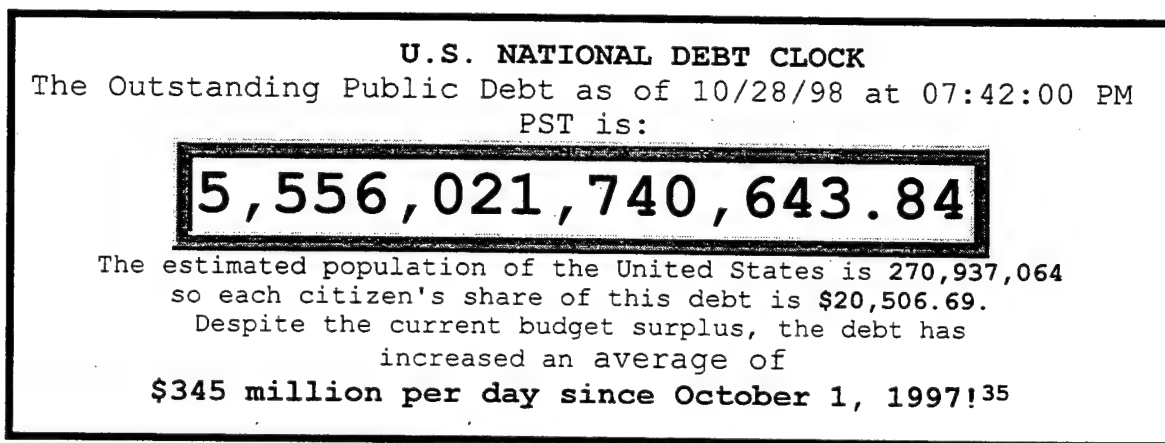
Figure 2.2

A further example of a private organization providing budget information is OMBWATCH. OMBWATCH is a nonprofit research, educational, and advocacy organization that

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[35] Hall, E., "Debt clock." [http://www.brillig.com/debt_clock/]. Nov 1998.

focuses on budget issues, regulatory policy, access to government information, and activities at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).[36]

Another such website that provides analysis and federal budget information is BudgetNet. BudgetNet is an initiative of the National Performance Review, established as a networking resource for government budget professionals, associations and other nonprofits, businesses, and educational institutions.[37]

Changes in tax practices are of interest to many private organizations. As a result, there are websites that monitor executive branch and congressional tax legislation activity. One such site is the Citizens for Tax Justice (http://www.ctj.org/index.html).

E. HOW TO ASSESS WEBSITES PROVIDING FEDERAL BUDGET INFORMATION

The proliferation of federal budget related websites by diverse organizations suggests that significant variation will exist in the type, format and quality of budget data on the Internet. Thus, users need a means of assessing this

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[36] OMBWATCH, "Homepage." [http://www.rtk.net/ombwatch/]. Nov 1998.

[37] Financenet, "Budgetnet homepage."
[http://www.financenet.gov/financenet/fed/budget/about.htm.]. Nov 1998.

variation in order to make sense out of the diversity, and to intelligently approach study of the budget process.

The criteria used during this research were timeliness of publication, ideological orientation and ease of access. These were considered the most useful of the many dimensions for characterizing budget related websites. Assessing websites based on these criteria allows a limited but still helpful means of categorizing them and of making some order from the chaos of the Internet. The next chapter develops these three criteria.

III. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUALITATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF FEDERAL BUDGET INFORMATION ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to identify qualitative characteristics by which websites containing federal budget data can be assessed. The chapter begins by identifying key characteristics found in websites containing federal budget information and discussing each characteristic. This thesis reviews and categorizes websites providing federal budget data based on these characteristics in subsequent chapters. This chapter is designed to explain these categorizations by identifying a range for each characteristic. In addition, it outlines the methodology used in subsequent chapters to score websites based on characteristic criteria.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF WEBSITES CONTAINING FEDERAL BUDGET DATA

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is the lead agency for developing policy and standards for all federal agencies associated with dissemination of information to the public. This includes electronic media. OMB Circular 130 is the source document for government-wide information resources management policies. However, the circular does not discuss qualitative criteria, except to note that

agencies are directed to disseminate information products on equitable and timely terms.[38]

Guidance for qualitative criteria in congressional website design was not located, with the exception of the Thomas website, where design efforts were focused on developing a prototype of a digital library based on government information. Guidance on the Thomas site is limited to the following: "The primary characteristics of a digital library were providing access to a significant amount of valuable information over a network."[39] In the absence of any apparent explicit guidance, Thomas excels in providing timely access to substantial budget data.

Private organization websites exhibit a range of format and content designs. No uniform standards were noted among the sites visited. Each site typically advertises its standards to potential users. Sites that market access to budget products typically promote the quality of access and depth of research available at the site.

This thesis concludes that organizations publishing federal budget data display a variation in terms of web

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[38] Office of Management and Budget, "Circulars." [http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OMB/html/circulars/a130/a130.html]. Nov 1998.

[39] Library of Congress, "Providing Government Information On The Internet: Experiences With Thomas." [http://thomas.loc.gov/home/dlpaper.html]. Dec 1998.

construction and information dissemination. Thus, the discussion of key characteristics to assess websites is a useful endeavor.

The characteristics of web-based federal budget data of most interest to users of all types include the following items: timeliness of the budget data; ideological framework or the political affiliation of the source providing the data on the web; and accessibility of the data in terms of ease of discovery, download formats and analysis available. These characteristics are used in this thesis as the basis to assess a range of websites containing federal budget information.

C.   TIMELINESS OF DATA

As discussed in Chapter II of this thesis, the federal budget is a function of an ongoing political process involving the many policy actions of the federal government. Government policy disposition can be understood in part, by the amount of dollars spent on a program or issue. There are many steps in the budget process (e.g., authorization, appropriation, taxes, etc.,) before funds can be drawn from the federal treasury and put to use in support of public policy.

In order for students of the budget to understand the budgetary implications of a policy issue, or for citizens and government officials to have an impact on the budget process, current information about budget events is required. This element of utility of the World Wide Web to the budget process depends on the timeliness with which the agency, congressional committee or interest group responsible for promulgating web-based budget information updates web pages and makes the information available for Internet consumers.

The federal government is formally committed to a policy of maintaining current budget data on its websites. OMB circular 130 states that:

> Systematic attention to the management of government records is an essential component of sound public resources management, which ensures public accountability. Together with records preservation, it protects the government's historical record and guards the legal and financial rights of the government and the public.[40]

An overview of several websites reveals that some websites are better than others in publishing timely and relevant budget information. As a criterion for evaluating

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[40] Office of Management and Budget, "Circulars." [http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OMB/html/circulars/a130/ a130.html]. Nov 1998.

websites, timeliness seems appropriate and can be used to examine the multiple budget related websites.

D.   IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

The US political system functions within a complex array of competing political interests. As noted by James Madison, there exists a "zeal for different opinions regarding government."[41]   Federal agencies, congressional committees and private organizations can and do exhibit distinct political agendas. These entities compete to win political and therefore budgetary recognition for their policies. The range and diversity of political viewpoints is a factor in the budget process.

Students of the budget process viewing Internet based information should be aware of the political orientation of the agency, committee or private organization providing that information in order to assess factors of accuracy, completeness and objectivity.   Thus, it is important for students of the budget process to understand the ideological orientation of a website where budgetary information is promulgated.

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[41] Madison ,James, "The Federalist Papers Number 10, 1787,". *Classic Readings in American Politics, 2nd Edition*, p. 30, St. Martins Press, New York, 1990.

E. ACCESSIBILITY

Given the current state of the art in Internet technologies, web-based data can be viewed, downloaded and manipulated by users from remote sites at virtually any time. However, ease of access to web-based federal budget data is a function of the effort devoted to website design and construction by Congress, federal agencies and private organizations.

Federal agencies are directed by OMB circular 130 to use electronic media and formats including public networks, as appropriate and within budgetary constraints, in order to make government information more easily accessible and useful to the public.[42] Some agencies extend this concept by providing in-depth analysis of budget issues, budgetary breakdowns by policy objective and related news concerning budget issues. Further, some agencies provide budget data in downloadable format, ready made for use in popular application spreadsheets and databases, thus allowing users to conduct independent analysis. Federal agencies routinely provide links to sub-agencies within the department. In cases where budget information is not easily found at the

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[42] Office of Management and Budget, "Circulars."
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OMB/html/circulars/a130/130.html#11].
Nov 1998.

main department site, web users can look for agencies with a Chief Financial Officer, or a sub-agency charged with budget functions in order to find budget data. At the other extreme, some agencies publish little or no budget information.

Congressional websites and private organization websites also display variation in terms of ease of access to budget information. Some sites provide budget information conveniently and prominently linked to the homepage. Other websites must be searched using search engines, or the user must manually search through links and subordinate pages to find budget data. This process does not always result in finding useful information, or does so only after an arduous search.

Since few standards exist to guide agencies in web design, users can expect and will see variation in accessibility. Thus, a valuable criteria for assessing web-based budget information is the extent to which websites have been optimized for use by citizens.

F.   CHARACTERIZING BUDGET RELATED WEBSITES

The characteristics or variables described above are used to categorize websites containing federal budget data. No precise tool for the measurement of characteristic

variables exists in the realm of website content. As such, much of the web content described above can only be judged subjectively. However, some websites are more timely than others, some websites appear to provide easier access to budget data and some are more obviously partisan in their use of data. This thesis argues that such differences in website quality can best be defined as of an ordinal nature.

Ordinal assessments have utility in an area where there is a lack of agreed upon standards or units. This is common in surveys where public opinions are used, such as in assessments of voter satisfaction with an elected official (e.g., very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied). Ordinal refers to the quality of an object, phenomena or event which has more or less of a given characteristic, but it is impossible to say how much more or less.[43] The characteristics used here to evaluate websites fit this definition. Thus, websites can be examined for certain characteristics and content assessed using ordinal means to support ranking.

In terms of the characteristic of timeliness, this thesis ranks websites in terms of the promptness of

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[43] Meier, K. J. and Brudney, J. L. *Applied Statistics for Public Administration, Revised Edition*, Wadsworth, Inc., Belmont, California, 1987.

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publication of budget data following a key budget event. Websites were evaluated following passage of HR 4328, the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Bill and other budget activity occurring at the end of the second session of the 105th Congress, (i.e., the summer and fall of 1998).

Some websites hosted by congressional activities and federal government agencies were quickly updated following legislative and executive actions. Others have yet to be updated as of this writing, and appear to reflect conditions from much earlier periods. Private organization websites displayed a similar range of timeliness. This thesis examines the time between when a budget action transpired and when a website was updated to reflect the new budget condition. This data is found in Chapter IV.

In terms of the characteristic of ideological orientation, ordinal ranking was difficult to use, as this characteristic is a subjective assessment on the part of the observer. However, some websites, notably those maintained by congressional budget committees and private organizations exhibit a discernable ideology in the manner in which budget information is published. Websites are assessed in terms of omissions of objective budget data or obvious political affiliation. The federal budget is a politicized process; not surprisingly governmental and special interest websites

exhibit a range of ideological orientation. This assessment is provided in Chapter V.

Accessibility is also a somewhat subjective assessment by the observer. Websites are evaluated based on the inclusion of graphics, quality of data, links to additional budget information, search capability and the ability to download budget data in multiple formats. Some sites are very thorough in providing access to budget data, while others provide minimal accessibility. This assessment is included in Chapter VI.

IV. ASSESSMENT OF TIMELINESS OF WEB-BASED FEDERAL BUDGET DATA

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses websites containing federal budget information in terms of timeliness. Select executive, legislative branch and private organization websites are addressed in this section to exemplify the range of speed and efficiency with which budget information was made available on the Internet, following budget activity. This thesis examined every major cabinet-level agency of the federal government. It also examined a select number of sub-agencies, key legislative branch sites and a sample of private organizations.

While each site addressed contained budget data, some sites were notably better at making timely budget information available to Internet users. The budget numbers and policy dispositions that make up the budget process are subject to dynamic change. Some websites, notably Thomas, select federal agency sites and some private organization websites, publish budget data promptly; within hours or a few days from when a budget activity occurs. These sites do so to satisfy budget watchers, constituents, government

employees and customers who interact with the budget process and demand timely data.

Some sites seem to delay publication of budget data by weeks. In some cases, organizations appear to forego web-publication of key budget developments. In ranking websites, the "site last updated" information provided by webmasters and found on many pages, was used to assess how timely a site was. Sites that limit budget data to the organization's FY 1999 request, and thus omit key budget data such as appropriated totals, adjustments, and actual spending, are evaluated as less timely.

Discussion and examples of sites not included in this chapter can be found in Chapter V, which evaluates ideological orientation, or Chapter VI which addresses accessibility. Discussion of a site was placed in an analysis chapter deemed appropriate based on the strength of the site's most prominent characteristic. For example, if a site provided substantial access, but the information was not especially timely, overview of that site would be provided in the chapter on accessibility.

A relative ranking of some of the activities sampled was developed (see Figure 4.1 below). While no precise measurement of timeliness can be identified, the sites can be grouped into two distinct groups; those that publish in a

timely fashion and those that displayed less timely web
budget data.   Discussion and examples of sites exhibiting
the timeliness characteristic are provided next.

**Rank of Websites
Based on Timeliness**

More Timely	Less Timely
Congressional website, Thomas	Department of Agriculture
usbudget.com	Department of Energy
Congressional Budget Office	Department of Interior
Department of Treasury	Department of Justice
House of Representatives	Department of State
Committees	Department of Transportation
United States Senate	National Aeronautics and Space
Committees	Administration
Department of Commerce	Social Security Administration
Department of Education	Center for Community
Health and Human Services	Economic Research (CCER)
Housing and Urban Development	Center on Budget and
Department of Defense	Policy Priorities
Environmental Protection Agency	Concord Coalition
United States Postal Service	
Office of Management and Budget	
Department of Labor	
OMBWATCH	
BudgetNet	
Center for Strategic and	
Budgetary Assessments	
GovExec	
Citizens for Tax Justice	
General Accounting Office	
Welfare Information Network	
Congressional Quarterly	

Figure 4.1

B.   EXAMPLES OF WEBSITES EXHIBITING TIMELINESS

1.   Main Congressional website, www.thomas.loc.gov

The THOMAS website is a comprehensive and timely source
of detailed budget information on the Internet.   Thomas is
also a prominent site in terms of accessibility, offering
access to the full text of Public Laws back to 1989.   Bills,
the   Congressional   Record   and   Committee   activity   are

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available for online retrieval after the Library of Congress receives the information from the Government Printing Office (GPO).

According to the Thomas website, The Congressional Record is the most rapidly updated online document at the site. GPO documents activity in the Senate and House overnight and usually transmits information to THOMAS by 9 a.m. (or earlier) the next day. The text is available online about two hours later.[44] Bill text takes GPO approximately two days to digitize for web publication. In January, the process may slow somewhat since the GPO processes many bills introduced at the beginning of a session.

Consumers of budget data can begin tracking the status of bills once a bill is reported out of committee to the floor of the House or the Senate. Legislative histories are made available on Thomas the following day. The timeliness and availability of web-published committee reports varies based on when a committee releases the material. In any event, the GPO and Thomas expedite the promulgation of web-published information.

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[44] Library of Congress, "Thomas, Frequently-Asked Questions." [http://thomas.loc.gov/tfaqs/homepage.html]. Nov 1998.

The Thomas homepage is a gateway to all types of congressional information. The budget process has a prominent place among the volume of legislative information since citizens accessing the Thomas homepage will initially be linked to the text of the Conference Report on the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Act (H.R. 4328) as printed in the Congressional Record of October 19, 1998.[45] However, users other than budget scholars may find it difficult to obtain answers to questions concerning specific programs (e.g., funding levels, revenue estimates) at this site due to the volume of information.

Budget committees, authorization committees and appropriation committees have specific sites and can be toured for budget related information. Thomas provides links to these committees, and to specific congressional actions of interest (e.g., floor actions, committee news and roll call vote tallies). Citizens can access links to committees in order to learn of significant public policy provisions in FY 1999 appropriations bills.[46] Links are

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[45] Library of Congress, Thomas, "FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriations bill." [http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.html?43,12]. Oct 1998.

[46] House Appropriations Committee, "Legislative Provisions in Appropriations Bills." [http://www.house.gov/appropriations/pr99sig.html]. Nov 1998.

also provided to multiple government activities outside Congress.

2.   Congressional Budget Office, www.cbo.gov

The mission of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) is to provide the Congress with objective, timely, nonpartisan analyses. CBO products are needed for economic and budget decisions and are a large part of the information and estimates required for the congressional budget process. CBO prepares analyses on a range of budget issues at the request of a committee, or the congressional leadership. Examples include CBO estimates of outlays resulting from authorization and appropriation bills. CBO also keeps score of congressional action on both spending and revenue bills so Congress can maintain projected expenditures within the annual budget resolution limitations.[47]

Significant federal budget information was found at this website. The number of topics was too numerous to list here, but includes a range from detailed analysis of current and future budget plans by function, to comparative analysis of alternative procurement, funding and taxation proposals. The website offers users options to select a variety of

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[47] The Congressional Budget Office, "About CBO." [http://www.cbo.gov/policies.shtml]. Oct. 1998.

budget documents.[48]   A search engine that queries the entire site is also available.

A key function of the CBO is to conduct an analysis of the President's budgetary proposals prepared at the request of the Senate Committee on Appropriations.[49]   The resulting report provides economic and budget projections projected for 10 years and may include analysis of current economic or budget policy issues.   Key topics of interest include effects of a federal deficit or surplus on economic growth or recent changes in the budget process.

According to the site, and based on the incorporation of CBO's website as a link in multiple federal agency and legislative websites, CBO's estimates have become an integral part of the legislative process.   Committees make reference to CBO in determining the final outcome of legislation, to verify if Congress is keeping spending within the totals in the budget and to aid Congress in meeting reconciliation instructions.

CBO is the starting point for budget documents and analyses.   The CBO site thus serves as a source from which

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[48] The Congressional Budget Office, "Documents."
[http://www.cbo.gov/docs.shtml]. Oct. 1998.

[49] The Congressional Budget Office, "Analysis Of The President's Budgetary Proposals For Fiscal Year 1999"
[http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=387&sequence=0&from=1]. Nov 1998.

other sites obtain information and, for purposes of this thesis, serves as a timeliness benchmark for judging other sites. Curious citizens can also use the CBO website to determine the cost to the government of operating the CBO ($24.8 million in FY 1998).[50]

3. United States Senate, www.senate.gov

The Senate homepage provides links to all Senate committee office websites. Within each committee website, budget related analysis and opinions are expressed in news releases, and within links to subcommittees. In some cases links to minority party website are provided.

One such site is the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations website, which includes a link to a site provided by the minority staff. The minority site complements the majority site and provides views on a range of issues including budget related news releases, opinions and information.[51]

Prominent budget related committees can be found at the homepage, including the Joint Committee on Taxation, the Senate Budget Committee and the Senate Appropriations

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[50] Congressional Budget Office, "CBO's Organization and Staffing." [http://www.cbo.gov/staffing.shtml#resources]. Nov 1998.

[51] Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Minority Staff, "Omnibus Appropriations/United Nations Fact Sheet." http://www.senate.gov/~foreign/minority/press/98/981016.html]. Nov 1998.

Committee. The Senate Budget Committee Majority website provides links to the Budget Bulletin, an online publication providing in-depth analysis and commentary on the budget process.[52] The Chairman's Mark, as discussed in Chapter II of this thesis, is posted at this site. Further, the majority position is amplified by online press releases and statements.

Like other Senate Committee websites, the Senate Budget Committee site has links to the minority staff. The minority website provides analysis prepared by the Senate Budget Committee's Democratic staff, in support of the FY 1999 President's Budget Submission.[53] The combination of majority and minority web-based provides diverse, sometimes contrasting perspectives on the federal budget.

4.   House of Representatives, www.house.gov

The U.S. House of Representatives homepage provides links to all House committee offices. Most House committees engage in the budget process in some manner during the budget cycle. As provided in the Senate website, links to prominent budget related committees are found at the House

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[52] Senate Budget Committee, "Budget Bulletin Index."
[http://www.senate.gov/~budget/republican/analysis/archive/bbindex.htm].
Nov 1998.

[53] Senate Budget Committee, Democratic Staff, "President Clinton's Budget for 1999 Summary and Analysis,"
[http://www.senate.gov/~lautenberg/budget1.htm]. Nov 1998.

homepage, including the House Ways and Means Committee, the House Budget Committee and the House Appropriations Committee.

Some committees and subcommittees provide easier access and more clarity in terms of how budget data is arranged within their websites. Hearings, testimony and floor debate information is published at some committee and subcommittee websites, providing the user a detailed view of topics related to the budget process. For example, the House Committee on Banking and Financial Services provides a complete and timely on-line library of markups, committee reports and hearing testimony.[54] In contrast, the House Subcommittee on Forestry, Resource Conservation, and Research (of the Agricultural Committee) provides a limited amount of hearing testimony online.[55] These variations are noted throughout the House (and Senate) websites and subordinate activity webpages.

5.   General Accounting Office, www.gao.gov

The General Accounting Office (GAO) is an investigative arm of the Congress, charged with examining matters relating

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[54] House Committee on Banking and Financial Services, "Homepage." [http://www.house.gov/banking/]. Nov 1998.

[55] House Subcommittee on Forestry, Resource Conservation, and Research, "Homepage." [http://www.house.gov/agriculture/forestry.htm]. Nov 1998.

to the receipt and disbursement of public funds. GAO performs budget-related analysis on topics across a broad spectrum of government and private activities.

A searchable database is provided at the GAO website. GAO reports can be downloaded or ordered online. Examples of online reports of audits conducted by GAO with relevance to federal budgeting are many. Examples include a GAO assessment of weaknesses in the Forest Service's accounting and financial reporting to problems with federal agencies' reconciliation of their fund balances with Department of the Treasury accounts.[56]

6. USBUDGET.COM, www.usbudget.com

USBUDGET.COM is a fee based information service that provides intelligence on federal budget and appropriations developments. USBUDGET.COM offers a subscription designed for users who desire limited access service once or twice per year. The subscription fee is currently $85 per week. Full year-round access to USBUDGET.COM for new users is $495 per year. The regular subscription fee for the second year and beyond is $850. The site license allows up to five users at a single site. Additional users at the same site can be added for $150 per user.

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[56] General Accounting Office, "GAO Month in Review: October,1998." [http://www.gao.gov/monthly.list/oct99/oct995.htm]. Nov 1998.

The USBUDGET.COM site contains extensive, timely, thorough tracking for each bill's legislative history, and provides background information such as line item detail and important testimony. The site covers the thirteen appropriations bills, reconciliation bill(s), continuing resolutions, supplementals and the budget resolution. Subscribers also are briefed on major authorizing legislation.[57] Committee mark-ups, press releases, analysis by program, agency and function are provided, as well as links to standard legislative sites such as Thomas or GPOAccess.

7.   Department of Commerce, www.doc.gov

The Department of Commerce (DOC) website contains the President's budget submission, and has extensive budget information published in a timely and accessible manner. Legislative issues and budget news items are compiled by the Department of Commerce's Office of Budget, Budget Coordination and Reporting Division.[58]

Updated 1999 Appropriations information is prominently listed next to information which projects FY 2000 budget

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[57] usbudget.com, "Tour of website." [http://www.usbudget.com/cgi-bin/georgek/tour/tour.pl?tour01.htm]. Nov 1998.

[58] Department of Commerce Office of Budget, Budget Coordination and Reporting Division, "Legislative News." [http://www.doc.gov/bmi/budget/legis/leginews.htm]. Nov 1998.

plans to issue the DOC portion of the President's budget submission on CD-ROM (and on this website) along with the Budget in Brief and the DOC Annual Performance Plan.[59] Citizens are encouraged to contact the site's webmaster, or the DOC Office of Budget, to obtain CD-ROMs for what is, according to the site, the first ever US government department budget submission on CD-ROM.

A very thorough review of budget allocations to DOC sub-agencies (listed under the link for bureau descriptions) is provided and includes adjusted figures for each bureau as a result of FY 1999 Appropriations. Personnel levels, performance goals and pay raise information are included in these budget documents as well. In terms of accessibility and timeliness, this site is an ideal example, allowing citizens a wide range of useful access.

8.   Department of Treasury, www.ustreas.gov

The Treasury Department provides federal budget information in support of the unique role of the U.S. Treasury. Since all financial transactions of the federal government must at some point transition through the Treasury, the Department has access to key revenue collection and expenditure information. The Treasury website

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[59] Department of Commerce Office of Budget, "Homepage."
[http://www.doc.gov/bmi/budget/#Otherweb].   Nov 1998.

provides extensive data and rich detail concerning key financial aspects of the government.

The site appears specifically designed to support citizen and scholarly research. Examples of the many types of data available include a daily treasury statement published each working day providing data on the cash and debt operations of the Treasury. This data is collected based on reporting of the account balances at federal Reserve banks. Also, A monthly summary of the financial activities of the federal government and off-budget federal entities is provided. The summary reports receipt and outlay totals, the surplus or deficit, and means of financing the government.[60]

The Treasury also web-publishes consolidated financial reports for the entire U.S. Government. These reports provide information on government operations and financial positions on an accrual basis. The website notes that data for the publication are obtained from federal agency accounting systems and forms the basis for documents such as a Statement of Financial Position and a Statement of Operations. Customary notes to financial statements and supplementary tables are also included.

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[60] US Treasury Department, "Financial Condition of the Federal Government." [http://www.fms.treas.gov/conditn.html]. Nov 1998.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS), a sub-agency of the Treasury Department, publishes a myriad of tax information available on the website in multiple download formats.[61] Information is also provided on reports that can be purchased from the IRS (e.g., individual income tax returns by state, exempt organizations by county and tax year).[62] IRS also provides data on revenue collection efforts and projects future tax receipts.

The Treasury Department's Bureau of the Public Debt provides summaries of the public debt ·to the penny.[63] Observers of budget deficit or surplus conditions and debt levels can also access summaries of interest expense incurred by US government borrowing.[64].

In addition to the information above, the Treasury Department's Office of Budget publishes a timely and

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[61] US Treasury Department, "Individual Tax Statistics." [http://www.irs.treas.gov/prqd/tax_stats/soi/ind_marstat.html]. Nov 1998.

[62] Certain data files are available on a reimbursable basis from the Statistics of Income (SOI) Division, of the Internal Revenue Service. The files reside on the SOI Electronic Bulletin Board, and can be downloaded by calling the IRS (202) 874-9574. The files are tabulations of aggregated data or microdata records.

[63] US Treasury Department, Bureau of the Public Debt, "Public debt to the penny." [http://www.publicdebt.treas.gov/opd/opdpenny.htm]. Nov 1998.

[64] US Treasury Department, Bureau of the Public Debt, "Interest Expense on the Public Debt Outstanding." [http://www.publicdebt.treas.gov/opd/opdint.htm]. Nov 1998.

comprehensive overview of agency and sub-agency budget information. Information on the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriation act and congressional action is provided at this website.[65] Links to key congressional budget sites with oversight of Treasury operations and budget are included. Overall, the Treasury website is a valuable resource for citizens and budget scholars.

9. Environmental Protection Agency, www.epa.gov

The EPA provides a direct link from the EPA Homepage entitled "Money Matters" to the EPA Chief Financial Officer website. At this site, a breakdown of planned budget expenditures, missions and goals is provided. A search engine is incorporated into the EPA site and can be used to retrieve numerous budget documents.

Budget actions which have significant impact on EPA operations are quickly reported in the EPA online newsletter Enviro-Newsbrief, including key congressional budget actions such as mark-up and floor debate. In many cases, the reports were web-published the day after the action.[66] The

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[65] US Treasury Department, "FY 1999 Budget Update." [http://www.ustreas.gov/budget/whatnew.htm]. Nov 1998.

[66] EPA, Enviro-Newsbrief "Clean Water Plan Gets More Funds From Senate Appropriations Committee." [http://www.epa.gov/natlibra/hqirc/nb/enb98/enb0612.htm]. Nov 1998.

EPA website meets or exceeds expectations of timeliness and assists citizens in tracking federal budget activity.

10.   Congressional Quarterly, www.pathfinder.com/CQ

Congressional Quarterly (CQ) is an independent commercial publisher of print and electronic information on Congress and government.   CQ is a subsidiary of the Times Publishing Company of St. Petersburg, Florida.   CQ provides subscriptions for a wide range of products, including a "Weekly Report" news magazine, a daily "Congressional Monitor" and a "CQ FaxReport," of summaries of floor activities, press conferences, and committee meetings. Subscription fees vary based on the number and frequency of products desired.   Information on subscription opportunities can be accessed from the homepage.[67]   In addition to subscriptions, CQ also provides extensive web-based information without charge.   The site advertises "Databases providing exhaustive, full-text searching capabilities and a level of original editorial content that has yet to be duplicated elsewhere."[68]

The CQ site offers a vote tracker, an innovative search option that provides timely information on key votes.   House

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[67] Congressional Quarterly, "Products and subscriptions." [http://www.cq.com/ProdsandSubs/prodsandsubs.htm]. Dec 1998.

[68] Congressional Quarterly, "About CQ." [http://www.pathfinder.com/CQ/about.html]. Nov 1998.

voting records and a summary of key points of the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriation Bill were published the same night (October 20, 1998) the measure passed the House.[69]   A similar overview is provided the next day (October 21, 1998) for the Senate vote on the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriation Bill.[70]   Other innovative features include. CQ's "Follow the Money" custom e-mail alerts on the 13 appropriations bills as they progress through Congress, and "My Custom Area" a web option that establishes user preferences to search CQ and government source data to deliver the information most relevant to the user's specific interests.[71]   Overall, CQ provides Budget watchers with a timely, play by play update of bill status and unique access to key budget issues.

C.   EXAMPLES OF WEBSITES EXHIBITING LESS TIMELINESS

1.   Department of Agriculture, www.usda.gov

Budget information on the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was found through the USDA's site search

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[69] Congressional Quarterly, "House passes final mammoth government spending bill." [http://www.pathfinder.com/CQ/housekey.html]. Dec 1998.

[70] Congressional Quarterly, "Despite Widespread Displeasure, Senate Passes Behemoth Spending Bill." [http://www.pathfinder.com/CQ/senatekey.html]. Dec 1998.

[71] Congressional Quarterly, "About CQ." [http://www.pathfinder.com/CQ/about.html]. Nov 1998.

feature and via links to sub-agencies including the USDA Office of Budget and Program Analysis. Citizens can determine how USDA projected spending levels relate to program objectives in the USDA 1999 Budget Summary. The summary is the basis for the President's Budget Submission.

Several key programs in the welfare area fall under the guise of the USDA including Food stamps, and Aid to Women, Infants and Children (WIC) programs. Accessing USDA sub-agency websites allows citizens to determine how much was spent on food stamps in 1996,[72] and changes proposed by USDA in user-fee revenue models for the 1999 Budget.[73] Some agency budget information, like the food stamp example above, is outdated or limited to estimates.

2. Department of Interior, www.doi.gov

The Department of the Interior (DOI) provides significant access to agency budget data, including progress of the DOI budget request through the congressional appropriations process. Mark-up, floor actions and conference reports are reported at the site as well as

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[72] USDA Food and Nutrition Service, "Food Stamp Facts."
[http://www.usda.gov/fcs/stamps/fsfacts.htm]. Nov 1998.

[73] 1999 USDA Budget Summary, "User Fee Proposals."
[http://www.usda.gov/agency/obpa/Budget-Summary/ 1999/text.html#user].
Nov 1998.

historical budget information that addresses ten years of prior budget activity.[74]

The DOI has oversight responsibility for U.S. National Parks and supervises activities related to the extraction of minerals. Specific budget totals for Interior-related projects are provided, as well as collection information for revenue generating activities (e.g., recreation entrance/user fees, grazing and timber fees). Prior year funding levels are compared with the 1999 request and conference agreement totals.

The site indicates the fact that multiple appropriations support agency activity (e.g., Energy and Water, Interior), and indicates status of the FY 1999 Energy and Water Appropriation. The webpage also indicated that the FY 1999 Interior Appropriation had yet to be passed, and did not indicate if DOI was addressed by the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriation. However, accessing the Thomas congressional website shows funding for DOI was incorporated in the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriation.[75] Despite this omission in

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[74] Department of the Interior, Office of Budget, "Homepage." [http://www.doi.gov/budget]. Nov 1998.

[75] Thomas, "Bill Summary & Status for the 105th Congress." [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d105:HR04328:@@@T |TOM:/bss/d105query.html|]. Nov 1998.

terms of timeliness, the DOI site contains useful information for users.

3. The Concord Coalition, www.concordcoalition.org

The Concord Coalition is a nonprofit organization. The coalition website states that the organization works for an end to federal budget deficits, for equitable Social Security and Medicare reform, for stronger long-term economic growth, and for a higher standard of living for future generations of Americans.[76]

Position papers on multiple budget related issues are available for viewing at the website. The Concord Coalition also web-publishes a "Tough Choices Deficit Reduction Scorecard" annually. The scorecard rates all members of the House of Representatives and the Senate based on votes for budget and entitlements-related issues. Web versions for both sessions of the 104th Congress and the first session of the 105th Congress were available as of November, 1998. While voting records and relevant budget legislation information data were available for the second session of the 105th Congress, they were not found at this site.

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[76] Concord Coalition, "About the Concord Coalition."
[http://www.concordcoalition.org/home/about.html]. Nov 1998.

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4.   Center for Community Economic Research (CCER), http://garnet.berkeley.edu:3333

CCER provides a web-based forum designed to educate the public on budget issues such as deficit problems, balancing the budget and budget cuts.   CCER does this via an innovative on-line budgeting exercise where web users can actually enter selections and cause changes in a simulated federal budget structure.

Established during a period of recurring annual deficits, the simulation asks users to cut the 1995 fiscal deficit in order to achieve a balanced budget.   While the budget exercise is useful in educating budget observers about trade-offs and pressures inherent in the budget process, the lack of updated budget information (the site still is organized to suggest a budget deficit in FY 1999 when, in fact a surplus has already been achieved by FY 1998) may diminish its usefulness.

V. ASSESSMENT OF IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION OF WEB-BASED FEDERAL BUDGET DATA

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses websites containing federal budget information in terms of ideological orientation towards policy issues. Select executive, legislative and private organization websites are addressed in this section to encourage Internet users to develop an appreciation of the range of ideological influence and how ideology affects the manner in which budget data is presented.

Ideological orientation in a website can take many forms such as press releases supporting certain policy options, debate on a particular budget issue and use of monikers to depict a program (e.g., labeling a program as pork). While no precise means of measurement exists to evaluate a site as having more or less ideology, the figure below (Figure 5.1) depicts a range from objective and analytic sites to those that are partisan.

Range of Ideological Orientation
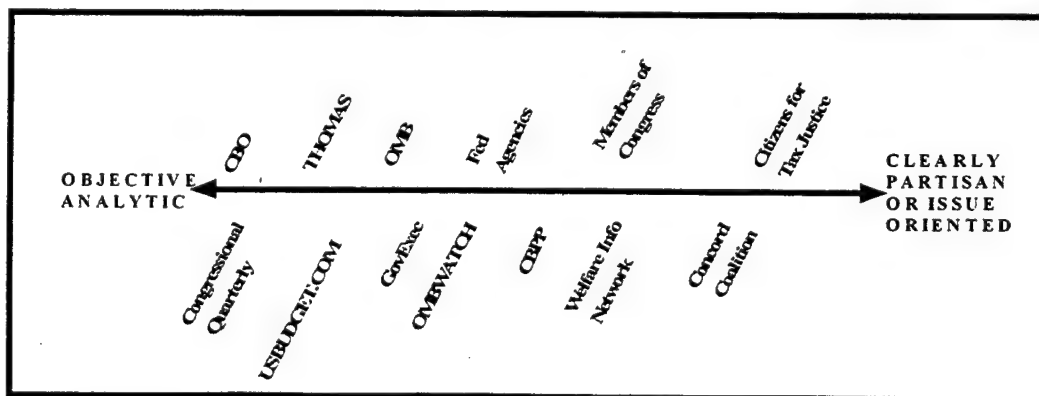
Figure 5.1

In many cases the budget numbers are accurate and can not be debated. CBO, government agencies and some private organizations provide estimates and projections of future budgeting conditions in an impartial, analytical manner. If an ideological orientation exists in CBO, it is indiscernible. However, interpretation of the impacts of many budget proposals are open to subjective judgement. This thesis argues that websites display a range of ideological orientation. Examples are provided below.

1. Administration websites

Ideological orientation can be noted throughout the websites developed by federal agencies and departments. At a minimum, agency sites advocate the programs and missions of the agency as well as the dispositions of senior agency officials of the Clinton Administration. Views at odds with the President's political or ideological orientation were not found. Examples of support for funding, legislation and congressional action were noted throughout agency sites. The Social Security Administration (SSA) website is an example of this tendency.

SSA attempts to promote economic security by providing funding for Social Security programs, including the old age, survivors and disability insurance (OASDI) programs financed by the Social Security trust funds, and the Supplemental

Security Income (SSI) program funded from general revenues.[77]

The SSA is mentioned here since recent debate has focused on the solvency of the SSA trust funds and the need for reform. The SSA budget website provides estimates of the rate of consumption of trust balances, provides the background research for cost of living adjustments and reports on administrative costs incurred by the agency. In addition, a hint of the ideological orientation of the agency was noted in comments of the Commissioner of Social Security, Kenneth S. Apfel, to the National Press Club, posted on the SSA website, as follows:

> Today, Social Security is not in crisis. But there are rumblings, and we are sitting here today as the rumblings grow closer. Today, I want to tell you "Why We Can't Wait" to make the [budget] changes needed to keep Social Security strong into the 21st century. We can't wait to save Social Security because changing demographics will place very real strains on our retirement system. Now, I don't subscribe to the hysteria that these demographic changes will somehow undermine the nation.[78]

A similar ideological bent was noted in the DOD website in press releases concerning the defense budgeting process:

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[77] Social Security Administration, "FY 1999 Budget."
[http://www.ssa.gov/budget/fy1999budget.html#Summary]. Nov 1998.

[78] Social Security Administration, "Strengthening Social Security: Why We Can't Wait." [http://www.ssa.gov/policy/coss_speech.html]. Dec 1998.

While highlighting the importance of weapons modernization, Secretary Cohen also is stressing that the long-term readiness of U.S. forces is threatened by the budgetary drain of excess infrastructure. The Department of Defense is burdened with facilities and bases that it neither needs nor can afford. To remedy this, Secretary Cohen today again urged Congress to approve two more base closure and realignment (BRAC) rounds.[79]

2.   Members of Congress

Many Senate (and House) members have established links at their individual sites to promote an issue or platform of interest.   One such site is that of Senator John McCain (R-Az)   [http://www.senate.gov/~mccain/].   Senator McCain reviews annual appropriations bills to determine whether in his opinion, they contain items that are low-priority, unnecessary, or wasteful.   These items are then placed on his website with analysis, and letters to the President recommending vetoes and questioning report language on specific funding items.   The site presents data couched in the phrase "Pork Barrel Spending," and represents Senator McCain's unique view of the budget process.

Virtually every member webpage contains editorial position documents depicting the political orientation of the member or committee on which the member serves.

[79] Department of Defense, "DefenseLink News."
[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb1998/b02021998_bt026-98.html]. Nov 1998.

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Examining member and committee websites, users can sense the majority/minority dichotomy. Members and the committees they support may exhibit a partisan tone in reporting budget actions based on which party is in the majority, and with respect to the views of the Committee Chairman. Members use their sites to web-publish documents that criticize or advocate administration policy, and to support or oppose ongoing legislation.

3.   Citizens for Tax Justice, www.ctj.org

Citizens for Tax Justice (CTJ) is a nonprofit advocacy organization providing research and reporting on taxation at the federal, state, and local levels. An example of CTJ products includes a distribution analysis of a tax cut plan, web-published the same day it was approved by the House Ways and Means Committee. Tax impact and voting records of the committee members were report highlights.

Contained within the CTJ mission statement is the ideological orientation of the organization:

> CTJ's mission is to give ordinary people a greater voice in the development of tax laws. Against the armies of special interest lobbyists for corporations and the wealthy, CTJ fights for: Fair taxes for middle and low-income families, Requiring the wealthy to pay their fair share, Closing corporate tax loopholes, Adequately funding important government services, Reducing

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the federal debt and taxation that minimizes
distortion of economic markets.[80]

CTJ provides analysis of ongoing congressional activity
and presents debate on new tax initiatives within its
framework as a defender of the "ordinary person."

4. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, www.cbpp.org

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP)
specializes in research and analysis ideologically oriented
towards budget policies and programs favorable to reducing
poverty and aiding low-income families. CBPP casts itself
as a key player in federal budget policymaking. The Center
attempts to dilute its image as a "liberal" organization
with a "business-page approach to poverty and issues of
fiscal discipline."[81] CBPP funding is provided by the Ford
Foundation.

The Center produces analytic reports that are
accessible via the web and focused on CBPP's interest in
programs designed to reduce poverty. Key budget issue areas
for online publications include taxes, welfare reform,
budget priorities, labor market policies, assistance

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[80] Citizens for Tax Justice, "About CTJ."
[http://www.ctj.org/html/ctjdesc.html]. Nov 1998.

[81] Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Homepage."
[http://www.cbpp.org/info.html]. Nov 1998.

programs and immigration.[82] The ideological orientation of the Center is clearly reflected in the topical choice and content of the information in this website.

5.   GovExec, www.govexec.com

GovExec is the web version of Government Executive Magazine.   The magazine and website are published by National Journal Group Inc., a publisher of magazines, newsletters, books and directories on topics in government, policy and politics.   The National Journal Group Inc. homepage states that its publications are "committed to providing publications and services that are non-partisan, reliable and of the highest quality."[83]

GovExec's essential mission is to cover the business of the federal government, departments and agencies. If there is an editorial advocacy present, it is to provide a government perspective in much the way that industry magazines such as Fortune, Forbes, and Business Week serve private-sector managers. The stated editorial goals of the organization include: covering developments of the executive branch; helping federal executives improve the quality of services; explaining agencies' problems in a way that offers

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[82] Ibid.

[83] National Journal Group Inc, "Homepage."
[http://www.nationaljournal.com/]

lessons about pitfalls to avoid; creating a greater sense of community for public servants; and helping to improve the image of the public service.[84]

The GovExec website publishes a weekly on-line column providing analysis and addressing the politics surrounding budgetary debates. No distinct political affiliation can be perceived, that is, the ideological orientation of this site suggests a rational, analytical focus, and openness. The site appears to desire a reputation as an objective and non-partisan research organization.

6. Welfare Information Network, www.welfareinfo.org

The Welfare Information Network (WIN) publishes information, policy analysis, and technical data concerning welfare reforms. The site also includes summaries of federal welfare legislation, and links to other welfare related websites. In contrast to the CBPP site, WIN is more focused on welfare reforms that will "reduce dependency" and promote the well-being of children and families.[85]

While not openly advocating a reduction of welfare programs, the WIN site can be distinguished from other sites

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[84] GovExec, "A User's Guide to GovExec.com."
[http://www.govexec.com/aboutge/guide.htm]. Nov 1998.

[85] Welfare Information Network, "Introduction to the Welfare Information Network." [http://www.welfareinfo.org/descriptive.html]. Nov 1998.

addressing these same programs. For example, users may find similar information at both the WIN and CBPP sites. CBPP is oriented towards providing training opportunities for non-profit, state and local government organizations in managing welfare related programs. Similar to WIN, CBPP funding is provided by the Ford Foundation.

WIN has a slightly different focus, attempting to link citizens and communities with welfare opportunities. In addition to funding from the Ford Foundation, the WIN site is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and the Foundation for Child Development.[86] While both WIN and CBPP focus on similar subject matter, and obtain funding from charitable foundations, there are slight but discernable differences in the ideological orientation of each website.

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[86] Ibid.

VI. ASSESSMENT OF ACCESSIBILITY OF WEB-BASED FEDERAL BUDGET DATA

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses websites containing federal budget information in terms of accessibility. Select executive, legislative branch and private organization websites are evaluated as to whether they provide users with innovative means and multiple formats to access budget data. Examples of websites exhibiting a range from good to poor accessibility are provided.

One limitation faced in conducting the analysis in this chapter concerns the ability of users to effectively use Internet resources; that is, the degree of familiarity with the web of the user of federal budget data. It is possible that a site initially evaluated as exhibiting less access actually provided sufficient data that a novice user could not locate. For those few sites that were evaluated as having poor access, examination of all links was conducted to ensure that data was not overlooked. Even so, the rapidity with which the Internet changes, and the constant effort of federal webmasters to improve citizen access makes any assessment a snapshot in time.

B. EXAMPLES OF WEBSITES EXHIBITING ACCESSIBILITY

1. Government Printing Office, www.access.gpo.gov

The Government Printing Office (GPO) provides an electronic repository where the documents and policies of federal agencies are archived. The GPO maintains web access where citizens can search and download various documents including budget information.[87] GPO is mentioned several times in this thesis and deserves inclusion here since GPO contains the most extensive library of official documents reflective of government policy.

2. Department of Defense, www.defenselink.mil

The Department of Defense (DOD) provides substantial web-based information across a broad spectrum of issues, agencies, programs and funding issues. The DOD homepage provides a link to the Annual Report to the President and the Congress, commonly referred to as the Annual Defense Report for the current and three previous years.[88] DOD will spend approximately $270 billion this year and is thus the largest single program funded by discretionary expenditures within the federal budget (45 percent of discretionary

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[87] U.S. Government Printing Office, "What Is GPO Access?" [http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/whatis.html]. Nov 1998.

[88] Department of Defense. "Annual Report to the President and the Congress." [http://www.dtic.mil/execsec/adr_intro.html]. Sep 1998.

expenditures and over 15 percent of the total federal budget).[89]   The defense budget includes substantial procurement funding of interest to domestic and international business concerns.   The total DOD budget impacts military personnel, bases and industries worldwide, resulting in numerous observers of the DOD budget process.

There are links to all agencies of the Defense Department from the DOD homepage. At least three key links are on the DOD homepage that budget observers would find useful. These include: the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition and Technology), located at [http://www.acq.osd.mil]; The Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Logistics), at [http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/]; and the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) at [http://www.dtic.mil/comptroller/].   These three sites provide links to numerous sub-agency budget related sites.

The DOD Comptroller site provides the most extensive DOD-wide budget information as well as web access to audited financial statements for the agency. A Comptroller site key link provides the defense budget in multiple download formats organized into various categories. An extensive overview of FY 1999 Defense budget request is provided which

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[89] GPO, "Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 1999." [http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/budget99/summary/sum_09.wk4]. Nov 1998.

includes economic assumptions, military pay, inflation assumptions, and historical data. DOD budget watchers can find program acquisition costs by weapon system and descriptions of major acquisition programs included in the defense budget request.

The DOD site also contains a definitive and useful breakout of defense spending, as follows: an overview of defense procurement programs for FY 1997 through FY 1999 (known as the P-1 breakout); Defense research, development, test & evaluation programs are itemized (R-1 breakout); military construction programs (C-1 Breakout); Operation and maintenance costs (O-1 breakout) are provided by component; Military personnel expenses are listed (M-1 Breakout) for active and reserve components.[90] In addition, budget documentation for each military service is found at the site and users can link to each service from this page.

In summary, the defense budget provided at this site is a fairly large and complex set of documents. However, DOD provides a level of detail sufficient to answer most questions pertaining to defense budgeting.

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[90] Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), "FY 1999 Budget Materials." [http://www.dtic.mil/comptroller/99budget/]. Oct 1999.

3. The Center for Strategic & Budgetary Assessments, www.csbahome.com

The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) is an independent, nonprofit public policy institute that publishes research focused on the defense budget. The organization was established in 1983. The CSBA website provides a range of analysis, testimony, reports and opinion pieces.

A review of several of the articles available from the site was conducted, and while distinct partisan bent was not noted, the articles and opinions appear to challenge federal defense budgeting strategies on intellectual grounds. Some reports can be viewed online at the CSBA site, while others are fee based and can be ordered from CSBA. The site also provides links to key defense budget related activities, such as DOD, OMB and CBO.

CSBA provides a useful article comparing both the House National Security Committee (HNSC) and Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) versions of the FY 1999 Defense Authorization Bill. Comparison of budget related committee legislation activity is a budget resource lacking in congressional or administration sites. CSBA also provides a useful overview of the defense budget process from the

agency request through final expenditure of funds for defense.[91]

4. Department of Education, www.ed.gov

The Department of Education publishes extensive and accessible budget information linked directly to its homepage.[92] The site is relatively timely as well as effective at providing innovative access. One week after Presidential approval of the FY 1999 Omnibus spending bill (H.R. 4328) that provides appropriations for a number of federal agencies, including the Department of Education, the Department website was updated with extensive budget information on student loan programs and departmental budget issues.

Links are provided in the site enabling citizens to compare federal funding levels for education with state and local percentages, as well as information on federal government revenue collection problems related to the nation-wide student loan default rate.[93] The data is

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[91] Center for Strategic & Budgetary Assessments, "Defense Budget Process." [http://www.csbahome.com/defensebudgetprocess.htm]. Nov 1998.

[92] Department of Education, "ED Initiatives." [http://www.ed.gov/pubs/EDInitiatives/98/98-10-29.html#1]. Nov 1998.

[93] Department of Education, "FY 1999 Budget." [http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/Budget99/BudgetSum/pages/apndx-1.html]. Dec 1998.

accessible by state and for over 7,000 postsecondary institutions.[94]

5.   Health and Human Services, www.dhhs.gov

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) budget is accessible through a search option from the homepage and at a related link to the HHS Office of Budget. The President's Budget Submission and HHS analysis of the budget by HHS activity are provided in multiple downloadable formats. Citizens can also search for and access testimony given at House and Senate Appropriations hearings on the FY 1999 Budget. This site provides a macro overview of all HHS activities, analysis of the HHS budget and links to key congressional budget websites.

HHS is organized into several sub-agencies including the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) which has responsibility for the key entitlement programs Medicare and Medicaid. The HHS Office of Budget 1999 estimate provides analysis of Medicare and Medicaid outlays and speculates on growth rates in these entitlements for the current FY and beyond. HHS included The Social Security Administration (SSA) as a sub-agency until SSA became an independent agency

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[94] Department of Education, "Student Loan Default Rate."
[http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/announce/cohort/index.html] Dec 1998.

on March 31, 1995. The HHS homepage provides a link to the SSA.

In addition, HHS incorporates sub-agencies whose actions are most closely associated with the notion of welfare such as the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).[95] Citizens attempting to determine amounts and expenditure areas for ACF can access audited financial statements at the ACF website as well as statements for other sub-agencies.

A clearly stated and impressive web management policy is promulgated at the HHS website and closely parallels the evaluation criteria in this thesis. HHS states its policy as follows:

> Organizations should strive for complete accuracy for all online information. Effective customer service and the credibility of HHS' public access Internet sites depend on the information's timeliness and currency. Out-of-date information must be removed or updated promptly. Information should be posted promptly, particularly time-sensitive information such as grant announcements and press releases.[96]

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[95] US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Audited Financial Statements [http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/oa/96aud.htm]. Nov 1998.

[96] Department of Health and Human Services, "World Wide Web Applications And The Internet Best Practices And Guidelines." [http://www.hhs.gov/progorg/oirm/bestguid.html#4]. Nov 1998.

6. Housing and Urban Development, www.hud.gov

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has oversight for such entitlement programs as the Community Development Block Grant and the Government National Mortgage Association. An overview of HUD programs and links to sub-agencies is provided at the site.[97]

Within each sub-agency link, some data was located providing macro expenditure totals by program. Under a budget link on the HUD homepage, the FY 1999 Appropriations Bill was reported on 21 October, 1998, the same day as announced by the White House.[98] Related data analysis is provided concerning many of HUD's programs. In addition, a search of the site identified press releases which disclose HUD program awards to states and local jurisdictions.

However, comprehensive distribution of budget information for HUD or sub-agencies or activities was not located on the site, through accessing related pages or via a site search option. The site offers comparisons of HUD

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[97] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD's Programs." [http://www.hud.gov/hudprog.html]. Nov 1998.

[98] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD - Back in Business Best Budget in Ten Years." [http://www.hud.gov/hudbkbus.html]. Nov 1998.

programs between FY 1999 and FY 1998 as of 6 October, 1998.[99]

In contrast, Title II of the FY 1999 HUD Appropriation Act (HR 4194, now a Public Law) accessed at the Government Printing Office site, provides more detailed information on specific HUD programs.[100] While some totals on the HUD site match the text figures in the appropriation, it is difficult for citizens to determine the actual budgetary impact of the HUD agenda. While timely, the site presented difficulty to users attempting to locate budget information.

7.   Department of Justice, www.usdoj.gov

The Department of Justice website provides budget information on the 1999 budget request for that agency. Users can access the information for FY 1999 in HTML format or Lotus spreadsheet format. Budget request figures are provided for each separate function of the Justice Department, but consolidated summaries were not located.

Previous FY information is provided in Lotus spreadsheet format only. The website did not exhibit information concerning expenditures, appropriations or other

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[99] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Comparisons of HUD programs between FY 1999 to FY 1998." [http://www.hud.gov/bkfact2.html]. Nov 1998.

[100] Government Printing Office, "HR 4194." [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi? dbname=105_cong_bills&docid=f:h4194enr.txt.pdf]. Nov 1998.

budget activity of significance to the department. The last update to the website was February, 1998.

8. Department of Labor, www.dol.gov

An overview of the Department of Labor website indicated links to formal department budget information. A search of the website for FY 1999 budget materials located information including press releases and reports of congressional testimony by agency officials before the Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education, House Committee on Appropriations.

Users are able to determine the Department's FY 1999 budget estimate from the main site. Sub-agencies such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), provide summary budget totals for prior years in website descriptions of missions and programs.[101]

9. Department of State, www.state.gov

The State Department provides a webpage that documents budget information associated with the Foreign Operations Appropriation. Budget total information in the website is limited to FY 1997, a FY 1998 estimate and the FY 1999

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[101] Occupational Safety and Health Administration, "OSHA Facts." [http://www.osha-slc.gov/OshDoc/OSHFacts/OSHAFacts.html]. Nov 1998.

budget request.[102] This information was web-published on 2 February, 1998. Updates as a result of the FY 1999 appropriations process were not found on the site.

Citizens can determine totals requested for peacekeeping operations abroad as well as foreign military assistance. The website also contains a limited amount of budget-related information in news releases addressing the FY 1999 budget submission, and testimony before the various appropriations subcommittees by State Department officials.

One novel addition to the State Department website is a link to a spreadsheet providing totals for FY 1999 budget request totals for the International Affairs Function (Function 150). The website indicates that Function 150 receives support from four separate congressional appropriations subcommittees, including Foreign Operations; Commerce, Justice, and State (CJS); Agriculture and Rural Development; and Labor-Health and Human Services. The spreadsheet demonstrates the breakdown of State Department activity compared with the appropriation providing funding. Also, the spreadsheet incorporates budget information for non-State department agencies (e.g., Arms Control &

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[102] US State Department, "Summary and Highlights FY 1999 International Affairs (Function 150) Budget Request."
[http://www.state.gov/www/budget/1999_budget_table.xls]. Nov 1998.

Disarmament Agency (ACDA) and the US Information Agency (USIA)), engaged in Function 150 activity.

However, The State Department spreadsheet seems to lack currency and leaves doubt in the area of accuracy.   The spreadsheet indicates FY 1998 totals as estimates.   For USIA, the estimate matches actual FY 1998 appropriation information confirmed at the USIA site.[103]   Since the site maintains dated information, web users interested in confirming agency totals have to verify agency estimates with data from other sources.

10.   Office of Management and Budget, www.whitehouse.gov /WH/EOP/OMB/html/ombhome

OMB is central to preparation of the federal budget, as they are responsible for formulating the President's spending plans.   OMB has oversight for financial and budget administration in executive branch agencies, and assesses competing funding demands among agencies in order to set funding priorities.   OMB ensures that agency reports, rules, testimony, and proposed legislation are consistent with the President's budget and with Administration policies.

The OMB website includes links to budget information and supporting documents listed below which comprise the

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[103] United States Information Agency, "Factsheet."
[http://www.usia.gov/usiahome/factshe.htm]. Nov 1998

President's budget transmittal for fiscal year 1999: Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 1999, analytical perspectives, historical tables, a citizen's guide to the federal budget, an overview of the budget system and concepts and budget information for individual states.[104]

OMB provides web access to documents electronically maintained at the Government Printing Office (GPO), as is the case in other federal agency websites. The documents found within the GPO website are the official, published version and the information retrieved from GPO can be used without restriction, unless specifically noted.[105] By accessing the same electronic repository, federal agencies ensure consistency in reporting budget information.

An additional link at the OMB site connects users to FEDSTATS.[106] FEDSTATS is a federally managed site designed to provide easy access to a range of statistics and information produced by numerous federal agencies for public use. While the FEDSTATS site does not provide independent

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[104] Government Printing Office, "FY 1999 Federal Budget Publications and The 1998 Economic Report of the President."
[http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/budget/index.html]. Oct 1998.

[105] Government Printing Office, "What Is GPO Access?"
[http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/whatis.html]. Nov 1998.

[106] FEDSTATS, "Homepage." [http://www.fedstats.gov/index.html] Nov 1998.

statistical analysis, the site contains direct links to the statistical information sections contained within multiple government sites.   By collecting statistical links from federal agency pages at one location, FEDSTATS improves a web user's ease of access to budget data.

11.   OMBWATCH Web Resources, www.ombwatch.org

As mentioned in Chapter II of this thesis, OMBWATCH is a nonprofit research, educational, and advocacy organization focused on budget issues.   Funding for OMBWATCH is provided by various private and government organizations.   OMBWATCH provides access to multiple articles and position papers. The articles cover aspects of budgeting and management by agencies of the federal government.

In terms of advocacy, OMBWATCH provides its perspective on budget issues through the use of e-mail and position papers posted at its website.   One such perspective was noted in a recent e-mail to subscribers prompting them to action on the FY 2000 budget:

> Final decisions are being made this week on the president's FY 2000 budget, which will be submitted to Congress next February.   Now is the time to contact the administration and let them know that increased domestic investment is a priority. Calls from leaders in the public interest community, professional organizations, and unions are needed this week. The message to the Administration should be clear: we need

money in the FY 2000 budget to meet domestic needs.[107]

This form of political activism identifies OMBWATCH as more than an analytical organization. Rather, the organization has an agenda that includes supporting unique positions as well as monitoring government performance. OMBWATCH does this in several articles on the website.

One article suggests that the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Act includes "a host of riders" that have an impact on the regulatory operations of agencies. Another article evaluates OMB management of the government information locator service concept (GILS). Both topics are easily accessible and are of significant interest to this thesis.[108]

The U.S. Government Information Locator Service (GILS) is a standard for identifying, locating, and describing publicly available federal information resources, including electronic information resources. GILS records identify public information resources within the federal government, describe the information available in these resources, and instruct the user in how to obtain the information. This

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[107] OMBWATCH e-mail, "Budget News & Analysis Subject: White House Calls Needed." Patrick Lester, December 15, 1998.

[108] OMBWATCH, "Budget Filled with Riders." [http://ombwatch.org/www/ombw/regs/reg-riders.html]. Nov 1998.

thesis undoubtedly utilized GILs resources as GILs forms the basis for the way in which federal sites disseminate their information to the public.

According to OMBWATCH, the amount, quality and access to available records has been "spotty." OMBWATCH concludes that the government's success in updating information holdings and content "has been far worse." According to OMBWATCH, a major contributing factor to the largely failed implementation of GILS has been OMB's lack of leadership.[109]

12. National Aeronautics and Space Administration www.nasa.gov

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) budget request for FY 1999 is provided at the NASA website in multiple formats. Spreadsheets are available for download that show distributions of funding among the various NASA sub-agencies, space exploration programs and various NASA geographic centers. The data appears organized for internal as well as external users. Users can determine the cost of the current international space station project as well as funding levels for US-Russian cooperative space

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[109] OMBWATCH, Report on the Implementation of the U.S. Federal GILS [http://www.ombwatch.org/ombw/info/gilsreport3.pdf]. Dec 1998.

efforts. Life cycle cost estimates for select programs are also found at the site.[110]

13. United States Postal Service, www.usps.gov

The Postal Service website provides an alternative to traditional budget information found on most federal agency sites in that it publishes financial statements rather than a budget request. A Balance Sheet, Statement of Cash Flows and Statement of Operations are provided, along with notes to the statement and an audit report.[111] While the Postal Service operates similar to a private business, some appropriated monies are provided by Congress and the distribution can be determined by reviewing the notes to the financial statements.

Subsequent to recent financial management legislation including the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990 (CFO Act) and the Government Management Reform Act of 1994 (GMRA), OMB published OMB BULLETIN NO. 97-01 directing federal agency Chief Financial Officers utilizing financial statements to use the format similar to that exhibited by the Postal

[110] National Aeronautics and Space Administration, "Budget request for FY 1999." [http://ifmp.nasa.gov/codeb/budget/]. Nov 1998.

[111] United States Postal Service, "Annual Report and Financial Statements." [http://www.usps.gov/history/anrpt97/finc_how_to_read.htm]. Nov 1998.

Service.[112] Students of the budget process can access this type and format of budget information at an increasing number of federal sites.

14. BudgetNet, www.financenet.gov/financenet

While access is still somewhat limited, BudgetNet is a web resource that is an exceptionally well intentioned and well organized site that may provide considerable utility to web-based scholars in the future. BudgetNet was established as a networking resource for budget professionals, with most of the site content made available through links to activities that originate budget information. BudgetNet evolved as a recommendation of the National Performance Review and is the budget equivalent of FEDSTATS, mentioned earlier in this thesis. BudgetNet is operated by the National Science Foundation (a federal agency) under sponsorship of the U.S. Chief Financial Officers Council. While BudgetNet lacks comprehensive links to all federal agency budgets, and some of the analysis provided at the site is dated, the site has the potential to serve as an ideal accessibility starting point.

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[112] OMB, "Bulletins."
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OMB/html/bulletins/full.doc]. Nov 998.

C. EXAMPLES OF WEBSITES DEMONSTRATING LIMITED ACCESS TO BUDGET INFORMATION

1. Department of Energy, www.doe.gov

The Department of Energy (DOE) maintains a website providing access to some DOE-related budget information.[113] This is accomplished by an addition of a subordinate webpage to DOE's site which provides links for DOE focused House and Senate appropriations bills, conference reports, and mark-up in one convenient location.[114] The site formally announces that an online version of the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Bill (the public law documentation) was not available as of 11/09/98; that date is indicated at the site as the last update. However, as mentioned previously in this thesis, the full text of the 1999 Omnibus Appropriation was found at several other websites.

The DOE site contains significant information supportive to internal users. Due to the classified nature of several DOE related programs (e.g., U.S. domestic and military nuclear power activities), some budget information appears inaccessible to citizens without appropriate clearances. However, for DOE employees, the website

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[113.] Department of Energy, "Office of Budget Home Page." [http://www.cfo.doe.gov/budget/index.htm]. Nov 1998.

[114] Department of Energy, "FY 1999 Congressional Bills and Reports," [http://www.cfo.doe.gov/budget/billrept/index.htm]. Dec 1998.

provides budget call or preparation instructions for past and future fiscal years. DOE's budgeting handbook is also available in downloadable format with significant guidance to DOE employees on how to effectively participate in the budget preparation process.

DOE's ability to grant extensive access to budget information appears challenged by the classified nature of agency activities. Therefore, DOE directs citizens towards links to legislative budget information. The website also has less currency than that observed at other federal agency websites.

2.   Department of Transportation, www.dot.gov

The Department of Transportation (DOT) website provides FY 1999 budget request information for key sub-agencies, including activities such as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), AMTRAK and the United States Coast Guard (USCG). The DOT Secretary's budget in brief is linked to the website and provides information in support of the DOT FY 1999 request. However, the website does not provide extensive breakdowns of budget information for each sub-agency, preventing users from determining detailed costs to

operate Coast Guard units, Amtrak trains or FAA Airport functions.[115]

Attempts to query DOT sub-agency links for budget information did not reveal readily available budget statistics, updated appropriation or other fiscal information. One exception was that links were provided to testimony provided by the DOT secretary to the Senate and House Appropriation Committees.

3.   Department of Veterans Affairs, www.va.gov

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides services such as the Montgomery GI Bill education benefits, and medical care for US military veterans and dependent family members.

In contrast to other federal agencies, VA provides limited budget information on its website. Information supporting VA's FY 1999 Budget was located using a site search option but was limited to a press release describing the FY 1999 Agency budget request.[116]

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[115] Department of Transportation, "Office of the Chief Financial Officer at DOT," [http://ostpxweb.dot.gov/budget/4budget.htm]. Nov 1998.

[116] Department of Veterans Affairs, "VA's 1999 Budget Submitted to Congress." [http://www.va.gov/pressrel/99budget.htm]. Nov 1998.

The VA homepage contains a link to the Chief Financial Officer website. Information at this site was limited to a Fiscal Year 1997 Accountability Report.

Some Senate and House sites provide more thorough budget information than was noted in federal agency websites. For example, in contrast to the lack of FY 1999 budget information at the Department of Veterans Affairs website, the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs provides detailed FY 1999 VA Appropriation information at its website.[117]

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[117] Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, "Summary of FY 1999 Appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs." [http://www.senate.gov/~veterans/99appro.htm]. Dec 1998.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a summary of the information contained within this thesis. The thesis attempted to survey the amount and type of federal budget data available on the Internet that a citizen, budget scholar, government administrator or other user can access. Key issues of interest were the scope of federal budget data available and a means of assessing or comparing sites. In order to compare websites, evaluative criteria were required to judge a websites content.

B. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to prepare this thesis resulted in substantial information in support of the conclusions in this chapter. The World Wide Web is a relatively new phenomena, and to understand how to find web-based budget data, a basic understanding of how the web functions was required. Review of the literature on the World Wide Web allowed for a better understanding of key web terms and of the Internet.

An examination of the literature on the federal budget process revealed the types of information and documents that

comprise the process.   These documents and data were then located on the web.   There is ample data on the budget process on the web.   The Citizen's Guide to the Budget, and the Senate Primer on the Federal Budget are ideal educational resources for students of the budget process.[118]

Comparing the data in websites was facilitated by the use of qualitative characteristics of timeliness, ideological orientation and accessibility.   These criteria enabled the assessments, criticisms and conclusions contained within this thesis.

C.   SCOPE

A primary research question in this thesis was to define the scope and nature of federal budget data on the Internet.   Over 120 websites were examined, and in-depth analysis conducted on over 50.   Every major cabinet level agency website of the federal government was viewed and links from the site were followed in order to discover and assess the quality and quantity of budget data.   Also, key

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[118] GPO, "A Citizen's Guide to the Federal Budget."
[http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/budget99/guide/guide.html]. Nov 1998.; and Senate Budget Committee, "Primer on the Federal Budget."
[http://www.senate.gov/~budget/republican/reference/cliff_notes/cliffapi.htm#Functional Classification]. Nov 1998.

congressional websites and sites maintained by private interest groups were sampled.

It can be concluded that the number of websites that contain budget data is fairly large. The thesis provides documentation of growth in citizens' access to and use of federal budget data on the web.

The budget is the result of a complex political process and it has a substantial impact on government operations. Defining the scope of Internet budget data also indicates what type of Internet resources are available. This thesis discovered that by design, as directed by OMB, or as a result of a perceived need to communicate to citizens and employees, federal agencies and committees of Congress routinely web-publish extensive data on the budget. Private organizations attempt to influence the federal government and hold it accountable, engaging in the politicized budget process to further organizational goals. Many organizations do this using the Internet, with websites that are constantly evolving in terms of improved quality for the user.

This thesis discovered budget related web resources, including viewable and downloadable files, press releases, position papers, interactive on-line budget experiments where users compute deficits while trying to balance the

budget, and educational materials that explain the history, process and terminology of federal budgeting. There are repositories of documents where citizens can view replicas of official budget laws. Some sites allow e-mail interaction with budget professionals, allowing citizens to progress from observers to participants in the budget process.

D.   CATEGORIZATION

Another goal of this thesis was to determine a means of ordering and categorizing web-based budget information. Since the proliferation of web use has increased substantially, web users need to order the universe of web-based information into an understandable framework. Using categories of timeliness, accessibility and to a lessor degree, ideological orientation, helps web users evaluate sites to determine if a site is an adequate provider of useful information.

1.   Timeliness

Timely web updates of budget information reflect the commitment of agencies, committees or organizations to keep constituents informed, and the significance of the budget. However, there were notable differences in terms of timeliness among the websites examined. With the growth of

the Internet as a communications medium, and a directive from OMB to improve access and timeliness, websites providing federal budget data will probably continue to improve their performance on this variable.

This thesis demonstrates that websites vary from publishing budget data the day it becomes reality to data that is years old, and in some cases, inaccurate. This range was discovered in each area examined, including federal government and private organization sites.

2. Accessibility

Variation was also discovered in accessibility of budget information on the web. Accessibility ranged from activities providing innovative and interesting budget related data to the provision of little data or sites that were too difficult to use due to poor web design. In cases where budget data was not prominently displayed or linked to the homepage, use of search engines incorporated into the site assisted in locating subject data.

Some agencies are constrained by an inability to publish data due to security. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), for example, has traditionally avoided disclosing its budget. While classified, the budget of the CIA is known by OMB and by the Intelligence oversight and

defense authorizing committees of Congress.[119] It is reasonable to assume that similar examples exist in DOD, DOE and law enforcement efforts of the Justice Department.

An additional factor of accessibility concerns whether data is readable and/or downloadable. Many sites provided data that could be extracted into spreadsheets, allowing for independent analysis. Challenges in this area of accessibility were nominal and included only cases where the data as printed was so voluminous that users would be unable to easily extract key points without knowledge of the format and content of reports.

Accessibility ranks with timeliness as a critical feature for citizens attempting to access the federal budget on the web. The range of access documented in this thesis indicates that web users must be prepared to cope with variation, learn to use search methods and remain persistent in their quest for budget data. However, web users that are persistent and dedicated will discover accesses to a rich universe of federal budget information.

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[119] The fiscal year 1998 figure is $26.7 billion.
Central Intelligence Agency, "Frequently Asked Questions of the CIA."
[http://www.odci.gov/cia/public_affairs/faq.html]. Nov 1998.

3. Ideological Orientation

Knowing the ideological perspective of web-publishing entities is helpful to users of budget websites. However, the differences noted in the websites queried in this thesis were subtle and best described as nuances; web-based budget arguments observed did not utilize major distortions of fact or intentional omissions of budget data.

Further, knowing the specific interests of a group or agency allows a user to search for information and articles that express a particular viewpoint or attitude. It is also helpful to budget researchers to know that products from certain websites are typically objective and non-partisan.

This thesis discovered ideological differences between organizations such as CBO and OMBWATCH. The former exhibits an objective, analytical perspective, the latter openly states political ideals, and promotes a specific budgetary agenda. Also, there were ideological differences noted between the majority and minority positions within congressional committee websites. This conflict is consistent with the U.S. political system and has only a minimal impact on the manner in which budget issues are portrayed on the web.

E. CONCLUSIONS

The Internet has grown rapidly, as has use of the World Wide Web as a means of communication between individuals and governments.

Most agencies of the federal government and Congress attempt to develop and maintain effective and informative websites. In almost all of the cases where a website was evaluated as less timely or less accessible, it was due to relatively minor omissions or delay in publishing material. In only a few cases was there an apparent disinterest in providing accessible or timely budget data. All agency websites provided ample information about agency agendas and positions on relevant issues, though some provided minimal information on their budgets.

A potential condition found on the Internet is that due to poor maintenance of websites, the web may contain outdated information. For example, portions of the CCER website, discussed in Chapter IV, appeared to have been abandoned, leaving outdated budget information on the web where it could cause a misinformed user to draw false conclusions. Web users should consider the source and date of publication of budget materials found on the web.

Lastly, there are multiple overlapping sources of federal budget data available on the Internet. Users must

find their own way among these sites. A risk is that data reported on one site conflicts with data reported on another site, leaving the user unable to understand budget authority, funding levels and subsequent impacts on policy. The risk of confusion is mitigated by the sound, effective and comprehensive coverage of the budget process by the Government Printing Office website and by Thomas, the congressional website. Both sites provide citizens with effective access to data on the budget in a timely and effective manner.

F.   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis is a "snapshot" of the web and organizational practices limited to fiscal years 1998 and 1999. This includes budget activity during the Clinton Administration and the second session of the 105th Congress. There will be growth in Internet technology and undoubtedly changes in the federal budget process. It would be of benefit to have several similar snapshots in the future to track trends and to document changes in this area.

A key methodology used in this thesis was searching websites, or following links within sites to discover budget data. Another researcher may have alternative searching skills or methodologies that would allow additional data to

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be discovered. Different conclusions may be available depending on the degree to which information is discovered using a different approach.

This thesis focused mostly on the perspective of private citizens' toward federal budget data on the web. Many websites provide data that appears designed for internal users and some sites are restricted for organizational use only. There may be worthwhile information about web practices to be discovered in examining this internal universe of web activity.

APPENDIX

LIST OF WEBSITES RESEARCHED FOR THIS THESIS

This appendix provides a list of websites referenced in this thesis and used in the course of research. The process of searching the Internet frequently required investigation of sites linked to homepages. In cases where these sites did not provide helpful information, they may not have been referenced in the footnotes. Many more websites were accessed and either provided redundant information, or were not relevant to the thesis topics. Information on the federal budget is sufficiently dispersed over a wide range of websites. Over 100 websites are listed below.

Executive Branch Websites

Department of Agriculture

[http://www.usda.gov]

1999 USDA Budget Summary, "User Fee Proposals."

[http://www.usda.gov/agency/obpa/Budget-Summary/

USDA Food and Nutrition Service, "Food Stamp Facts."

[http://www.usda.gov/fcs/stamps/fsfacts.htm1999/text.html#user]

Department of Commerce

[http://www.doc.gov]

Department of Commerce Office of Budget, Budget Coordination and Reporting Division, "Legislative News."

[http://www.doc.gov/bmi/budget/legis/leginews.htm]

Department of Commerce Office of Budget, "Homepage."

[http://www.doc.gov/bmi/budget/#Otherweb]

Department of Defense

[http://www.defenselink.mil]

DOD Acquisition

[http://www.acq.osd.mil/acqWeb/]

Defense Comptroller

[http://www.dtic.mil/comptroller]

Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller),

"FY 1999 Budget Materials."

[http://www.dtic.mil/comptroller/99budget/]

Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Logistics)

[http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/];

Department of Defense, "DefenseLink News."

[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb1998/b02021998_bt026-98.html]

Department of Defense. "Annual Report to the President and the Congress."

[http://www.dtic.mil/execsec/adr_intro.html]

Department of Education

[http://www.ed.gov]

Department of Education, "ED Initiatives."

[http://www.ed.gov/pubs/EDInitiatives/98/98-10-29.html#1]

Department of Education, "FY 1999 Budget."

[http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/Budget99/BudgetSum/pages/apndx-1.html].

Department of Education, "STUDENT LOAN DEFAULT RATE."

[http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/announce/cohort/index.html]

Department of Energy

[http://www.doe.gov]

Department of Energy, "Office of Budget Home Page."

[http://www.cfo.doe.gov/budget/index.htm]

Department of Energy, "FY 1999 Congressional Bills and Reports,"

[http://www.cfo.doe.gov/budget/billrept/index.htm]

Health and Human Services

[http://www.dhhs.gov]

Health and Human Services, "World Wide Web Applications And The Internet
Best Practices And Guidelines."

[http://www.hhs.gov/progorg/oirm/bestguid.html#4]

Health and Human Services Web Server Statistics for [hhs.gov].

[http://www.hhs.gov/analog/199811.html#Rep3]

Housing and Urban Development

[http://www.hud.gov]

Housing and Urban Development, "HUD's Programs."

[http://www.hud.gov/hudprog.html]

Housing and Urban Development, "HUD - Back in Business Best Budget in
Ten Years."

[http://www.hud.gov/hudbkbus.html]

Housing and Urban Development, "Comparisons of HUD programs between FY
1999 to FY 1998."

[http://www.hud.gov/bkfact2.html]

Department of Interior

[http://www.doi.gov]

Interior Office of Budget

[http://www.doi.gov/budget/]

Department of Justice

[http://www.usdjo.gov]

Department of Justice 1999 Congressional Budget Request

[http://www.usdoj.gov/02organizations/02_3.html]

Department of Labor

[http://www.dol.gov]

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Department of Labor FY 1999 Budget Appropriations

[http://www.dol.gov/dol/_sec/public/budget/main.htm]

Occupational Safety and Health Administration, "OSHA Facts."

[http://www.osha-slc.gov/OshDoc/OSHFacts/OSHAFacts.html]

Department of State

[http://www.state.gov]

Department of State, "Summary and Highlights FY 1999 International Affairs Budget Request."

[http://www.state.gov/www/budget/1999_budget_table.xls]

United States Information Agency, "Factsheet."

[http://www.usia.gov/usiahome/factshe.htm]

Department of Transportation

[http://www.dot.gov]

Department of Transportation, "Office of the Chief Financial Officer at DOT,"

[http://ostpxweb.dot.gov/budget/4budget.htm]

U.S. Coast Guard

[http://www.uscg.mil/]

About The Federal Aviation Administration

[http://www.faa.gov/about.htm]

Department of Treasury

[http://www.ustreas.gov]

Treasury Department, "Financial Condition of the Federal Government."

[http://www.fms.treas.gov/conditn.html]

Treasury Department, "Individual Tax Statistics."

[http://www.irs.treas.gov/prod/tax_stats/soi/ind_marstat.html]

Treasury Department, Bureau of the Public Debt, "Public debt to the penny."

[http://www.publicdebt.treas.gov/opd/opdpenny.htm]

Treasury Department, Bureau of the Public Debt, "Interest Expense on the Public Debt Outstanding."

[http://www.publicdebt.treas.gov/opd/opdint.htm]

Treasury Department, "FY 1999 Budget Update."

[http://www.ustreas.gov/budget/whatnew.htm]

Department of Veterans Affairs

[http://www.va.gov]

Department of Veteran's Affairs, "VA's 1999 Budget Submitted to Congress."

[http://www.va.gov/pressrel/99budget.htm]

Federal Statistics

[http://www.fedstats.gov]

Federal Gateway Web Site

{http://www.fedworld.gov]

Government Printing Office

[http://www.access.gpo.gov]

Government Printing Office, "What Is GPO Access?"

[http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/whatis.html]

Government Printing Office, "HR 4194."

[http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?

dbname=105_cong_bills&docid=f:h4194enr.txt.pdf]

Government Printing Office, "A Citizen's Guide to the Federal Budget."

[http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/budget99/guide/guide.html]

Office of Management and Budget

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OMB/html/ombhome

Office of Management and Budget, "Circulars."

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OMB/html/circulars/a130/a130.html]

Office of Management and Budget "Bulletins."

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/EOP/OMB/html/bulletins/full.doc]

Environmental Protection Agency,

EPA, Enviro-Newsbrief "Clean Water Plan Gets More Funds From Senate Appropriations Committee."

[http://www.epa.gov/natlibra/hqirc/nb/enb98/enb0612.htm]

Central Intelligence Agency, "Frequently Asked Questions of the CIA."

[http://www.odci.gov/cia/public_affairs/faq.html]

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

[http://www.nasa.gov]

National Aeronautics and Space Administration, "Budget request for FY 1999."

[http://ifmp.nasa.gov/codeb/budget/]

Social Security Administration, "FY 1999 Budget."

[http://www.ssa.gov/budget/fy1999budget.html#Summary]

Social Security Administration, "Strengthening Social Security: Why We Can't Wait."

[http://www.ssa.gov/policy/coss_speech.html]

United States Postal Service

[http://www.usps.gov]

United States Postal Service, "Annual Report and Financial Statements."

[http://www.usps.gov/history/anrpt97/finc_how_to_read.htm]

Legislative Branch Websites

Main Congressional website, Thomas

[http://www.thomas.loc.gov]

Thomas, "Bill Summary & Status for the 105th Congress."
[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d105:HR04328:@@@T

|TOM:/bss/d105query.html|]

Thomas, "Usage Statistics for the THOMAS World Wide Web Server

[http://thomas.loc.gov/stats/stats.html]

Thomas, "Major Legislation by Short Title."

[http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d105/hot-titl.html]

Unites States Congress, "1999 Treasury and Postal Appropriation Act."

[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d105:HR04104:@@@D]

Thomas, "Frequently-Asked Questions."

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